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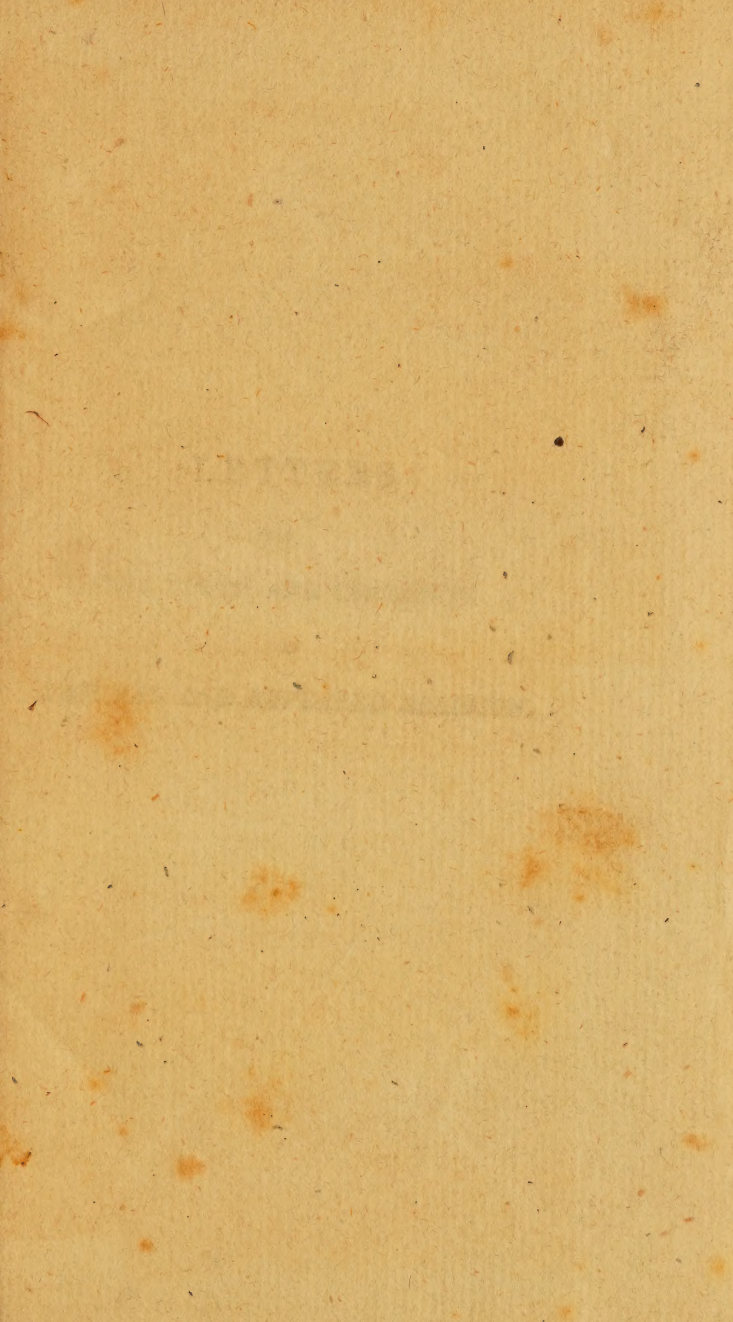
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Wilson, Joseph,

Letters on the truth and
certainty of natural and



LETTERS

ON

THE TRUTH AND CERTAINTY

OF

NATURAL AND REVEALED RELIGION.

LETTERS
ON
THE TRUTH AND CERTAINTY
OF
NATURAL AND REVEALED RELIGION;
ADDRESSED TO
A STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY:
AND INTENDED AS
AN INTRODUCTION
TO BISHOP BUTLER'S ANALOGY OF RELIGION,
NATURAL AND REVEALED,
TO THE CONSTITUTION AND COURSE OF NATURE.

BY THE REV. JOSEPH WILSON, A. B.

For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. *Romans i. 20.*

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1810.

LETTERS

INTRODUCTION

NATURAL AND REVEALED RELIGION

LETTER I

ADDRESSED TO

THE ACADEMY OF THE SCIENCES

BY THE REV. JOSEPH WILSON, A.B.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED A PREFACE
BY THE REV. JOSEPH WILSON, A.B.
NATURAL AND REVEALED
RELIGION AND COURSE OF NATURE

THE REV. JOSEPH WILSON, A.B.
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY
AND DIVINITY

PRINTED FOR T. C. AND J. R. LIVINGSTON
NO. 10, ST. MARK'S CHURCH-YARD
BY LAW AND GILLEY, OF JOHN'S SQUARE, CORNER OF

1810.

INTRODUCTION, &c.

LETTER I.

On Probable and Moral Evidence.

Cheam, January, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

YOU have often observed to me, that you had considerable difficulty in understanding Butler's Analogy; the same thing is generally experienced by young men; and I have frequently wished something done to make the book more easy. I do not think the difficulty is so much in the subject, as in the style; if, therefore, I can facilitate your understanding the book, by simplifying it a little, I shall feel very great pleasure. But do not think my letters to you, upon this subject, will supersede the necessity of reading the book itself. I wish you, by all means, to study the book most attentively; for there is a vastness of idea, and a generalization, and, at the same time, a particularity of expression, which is scarcely to be found in any other work. My pur-

B

pose then is to give you what I hope will serve as an introduction to it; and help you to understand it more distinctly. And as his great object is to shew, that there is an analogy between religion both natural and revealed, and the course of nature as it now exists; let me, as nearly as I can, give you his ideas upon Probability and Analogy, and the way in which he applies them.

Now between probable and demonstrative evidence for the truth of any thing, there is an essential difference; for demonstrative gives the most certain assurance of a thing's being true, but probable affords very various degrees of belief. You would not believe a thing true upon one slight presumption; but if that presumption be very often repeated, it will make the thing morally certain. Thus, if a man should this day observe the tide to ebb and flow, and the sun to rise and set, he may suppose the same thing will take place to-morrow: but when he reflects that the tide has ebbed and flowed, the sun has risen and set every day for ages, he is fully assured they will do the same to-morrow.

You have no doubt often thought a thing was probably true, when you did not feel sure it was. If a child live to twenty, you believe he will grow to the strength and stature of a man; and you expect your daily food will give you vigour and energy.

Now why do you believe this, but because you know this is generally the case? You compare like things in your mind; and hence you make your inference. A black prince, as Mr. Locke tells, who had always lived in a warm climate, would, from analogy, suppose there was no such thing as ice; but you, from greater experience of heat and cold, feel assured that in some part of our winter there will be ice. You and the prince reason from analogy: but your experience is greater, therefore your analogy is more extensive. It is true, indeed, that probable evidence gives only imperfect information; it applies to finite creatures only, for to God nothing can be probable. He knows all possible things, whether past, present, or future. But to man, probability is the very guide of life.

On whatever side of a question then there is the greater probability, to that side we must lean. Like as when we weigh two things in a pair of true scales, the smallest inclination of the beam shews us which is the heavier, so we determine often in matters of mere speculation; and in matters of practice, the smallest degree of weight on one side more than another binds us to act accordingly. Nay, in some cases, a man must act, not only where there is very little probability, but where there is none, nay where the probability is against him; for if a man were drowning, he would endeavour to save himself by

a rotten bough, though it were probable it would break.

Analogical reasoning you must perceive then is of very great use; indeed you employ it daily without reflecting upon it. You act upon it, I may say, incessantly in the business of life. Let us see then, if there is not a likeness between that system of things which revelation teaches, and that which is the known course of nature. And if I can shew you that there is (as I certainly shall), then it will be probable that both these systems proceed from the same author. Do you grant me that there is a God, the author of nature, and the intelligent governor of the world; and you shall see, that this concession will answer the leading objections, which are made against divine revelation. But remember, it is not reasonable to form your notions of the constitution of the world, like Des Cartes, upon principles without foundation; or to form your notions upon principles which are true, but inapplicable to the case to which you apply them; as they who would explain the structure of the human body by mathematics. For to form your opinions in this manner, is to make an hypothesis to suit your reasoning. But, on the other hand, it is proper to join abstract reasoning with the observation of facts, and to argue from known facts to others that are like them. You may fairly argue from what you know of

the divine government over intelligent creatures to that which is unknown; and from what is present, to infer what is likely to be hereafter.

Let it then be granted that there is a God, the intelligent author of nature, and natural governor of the world, and we shall find analogical reasoning, both a practical thing, and applicable to natural and revealed religion. We shall find it a much better method, than that of forming our notions of God's government by hypothesis; or of vainly conjecturing, as some have done, *how* the world might have been framed. We have not faculties to measure the designs of God, or to discern the things which would best accomplish them. An illiterate clown is not competent to judge of the conduct of a prime minister; infinitely less are we able to judge of the ways of the Almighty. *Take the world then as it is, and compare the known course of nature, with what is called the moral system of nature; compare also that dispensation of Providence which you find yourself under, to that which christianity teaches you to believe and expect, and you will find them analogous, or alike.*

You will find the analogy pursued in these letters pretty extensive; it will shew you that both natural and revealed religion are of serious moment; subjects not to be ridiculed, unless, indeed, you will ridicule the system of nature itself. You will find

also that this analogy will answer, in a very great degree, the objections which are made to the evidences for christianity; for you must ever recollect, that *objections against a proof, and objections against what is said to be proved, are different things.*

Now I shall apply this analogical reasoning to the doctrine of a future state,—a future state of rewards and punishments according to our conduct in this life; to the doctrine of our present life being a state of trial and discipline for a future one, notwithstanding the objections drawn from the doctrines of necessity, or even of wisdom and goodness: I shall apply it to the doctrines of this world being in a state of wickedness and ruin, and hence that christianity was revealed to man, and is of the utmost importance; I shall consider christianity as being proved by miracles; but yet containing many things that may appear strange; and as being a system managed by a divine person, the Messiah; though not revealed to all men, nor with the strongest possible evidence to those to whom it is revealed, but to those only and in that manner in which God thought fit. It will appear also that christianity in its scheme, its publication, its evidences, and in the particular parts of it objected to, is analogous to the known course of nature; and that if you object to christianity you must also object to that known

course of nature. In one word, you must either be a christian or an atheist.

These subjects I shall pursue in my following letters; and in my next shall begin with a future state, as that which is the foundation of all those hopes and fears, which are of any moment to man.

I am, dear Sir, yours affectionately,

J. W.

P. S. On the subject of moral evidence, I particularly recommend to you a small but valuable work, lately published by the Rev. Mr. Gambier. And I would just hint, that I think all kinds of evidence and proof, may, perhaps, ultimately be resolved into self-evident principles.

LETTER II.

On a Future Life.

Cheam, January, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

YOU have no doubt read and heard something about identity; and that it is difficult to determine, or even to conceive, how it is we are still the same. But without troubling either you or myself about this, let me point out to you some changes we *have* undergone, and *may* undergo, without being destroyed; and hence infer from analogy, that it is probable we may survive death: that death may be nothing but a change; and that we may exist after it in a state of life and perception.

Now observe, first, how different your state in infancy and manhood. When a man, your powers and means of action, thinking, and enjoying, are very different from what they were when you were a child. Look also at the vast changes which take place in worms that become flies; at the various states of the butterfly, and consider how different a bird exists when in the shell and when out of it. But above all, think how different you yourself were, when in the womb, from what you are now. You

were sustained by a perfectly different process; you existed in a manner very different from that in which you now exist. You may then exist after death, just as naturally as you now exist after birth. This would be merely according to the analogy of nature; and according to what we see in the world every day.

But I would wish you to consider, secondly, that you have capacities for action, for enjoying pleasure, and suffering pain: you know you are capable of action, of happiness, and of misery. And as you have these capacities before death, it is a presumption you will have them after death; unless you are certain death will annihilate you, of which you are not certain. Unless you have a positive reason for the contrary, it is probable all things will continue, in all respects, as they are. From analogy you think the world will be to-morrow as it is to-day: nor have you any other reason for thinking any substance, God only excepted, will continue to exist another moment. But you see you do continue to exist; it is probable then you will exist after death. There is nothing which you can expect will annihilate you but death: but you have no *positive* reason for expecting this: the probability then is, that you will survive it.

But let it be granted there should be a *suspicion* that death may annihilate you; yet there is no dis-

ting reason for such a suspicion. For if there is any distinct reason, it must arise either from *the reason of the thing*, or *from the analogy of nature*. Now you cannot prove from the reason of the thing, no nor argue from it, that death will annihilate you; for you do not know, properly speaking, what death is: and as you do not know what it is, how can you argue from it? You know nothing of death but a few effects; such as, that it dissolves your flesh, skin, and bones. But these effects do not by any means necessarily imply your annihilation; or the destruction of a living agent. You do not know what your faculties of perceiving and acting depend upon: but you know that they exist, as in sleep or in a swoon, when they are not exercised; what hinders then, that they may exist in death? Their existence may depend upon something which death does not, cannot destroy; their existence and their exercise are quite different things; you cannot then, from the reason of the thing, infer that death will be your destruction.

And as for analogy, it does not give you the slightest reason to suppose, that animals ever lose their powers of action and perception. Death, indeed, destroys the *sensible* proof of the existence of these faculties; it removes them from our sight, but does not prove that they are annihilated. You have not faculties to trace things through or beyond

death; and, therefore, you have no right to suppose that they do not exist at all, nor in any manner after death. But since you know that animals possess their powers of action and perception, up to the very period to which you can trace them; this makes it probable, that they retain them afterwards, and that death does not destroy them. And as you have gone through prodigious changes in life,—from being in the womb to being born,—from infancy to youth, and are still the same person; it is probable, that death may be only an introduction into a new state of being. Death, in fact, may be but another birth to you.

But, perhaps, you have still some imaginary apprehension, that death may annihilate you; for imagination often obscures reason, and we take things for granted of which we know nothing. We often get prejudices without any real foundation. Let me then consider those apprehensions a little, and shew you how groundless they are.

Now, first, if death annihilates us, it must be because we are compounded and discernible. But consciousness is an indivisible thing; that, then, which is conscious (which is properly ourselves), must also be indivisible. Now suppose, that that which is properly yourself is a simple being, which is as easy as to suppose you are compounded, then your body is a mere instrument. Upon this suppo-

sition, your bodily powers are no *necessary* part of yourself; and you may live out of the body as well as in it. The dissolution of your body, then, no more implies the annihilation of yourself, i. e. of that which is the subject of consciousness, and of your faculties of action and perception, than the dissolution of the chair you sit on, or the stick you walk with.

But though we cannot prove by experiment the absolute oneness of what is properly ourselves; yet suppose this unity or oneness, and then it must follow, that our bodies are mere organs or instruments with which we act. And whether the mind be material or immaterial, yet the destruction of the body does not imply the mind's destruction. For only recollect that you have seen men without arms and legs, and many other important parts of the body, and yet be still the same persons;—that you have nothing of that body you had when a child, and yet are still the same person:—recollect these things, I say, and it must teach you to distinguish between what is properly yourself, and a large quantity of matter called your body. It will teach you, that the body may be destroyed, and yet the mind remain entire and ever the same. Nay, to be more particular, let it be admitted that the mind is discernible; yet you cannot determine its bulk. But unless you can determine its bulk, a thing which no one can do, to

be larger than the solid elementary particles of matter which no natural force can dissolve, then you have no reason to suppose that death can dissolve the mind.

And as you remain the same, though your flesh and bones change, and which therefore are not yourself: so also you have no reason to suppose any *internal system* of matter is yourself. All that can be said of any system of matter, however intimately we may be connected with it, is, that the mind and it mutually affect each other; but this may be said, in a degree, of all foreign matter which gives us ideas, and over which we have any power. The dissolution then of any system of matter, whether internal or external, does not prove the dissolution of the mind. Your whole body has been changed over and over again, while you are still the same and possess the same oneness; what reason then have you to suppose, that because death makes a *sudden* change, you will cease to be the same, any more than by the *gradual* changes you have already undergone?

Nor have you any right to suppose you are destroyed when your senses are. For what are your senses, but instruments which convey ideas? and the same thing may be said of a magnifying glass, a tree, or a house, in a degree. But you do not think you are destroyed, when the glass is broken,

the tree felled, or the house burnt: nor ought you to think then that the destruction of your body or senses is the destruction of yourself. Does not the mind use the eyes to perceive objects with, and when they fail do we not employ glasses? When our feet fail, do we not use crutches; or our ears, a hearing trumpet? Our senses, in fact our whole body, is but an instrument to the mind; and the destruction of the body no more necessarily implies the destruction of yourself, than does the destruction of your spectacles, your crutches, or your hearing trumpet.

But, perhaps, you may ask, are not these observations applicable to brutes, and may they not be immortal? Well, let this be granted; and it will not at all invalidate them. Do you know what latent powers brutes may be endued with? There was a time, when you yourself had not the powers of a brute. At one time, when in the womb, what were you more than an unconscious piece of matter? But your powers were latent; and time and change developed them. What, therefore, time and change may effect in brutes, you cannot tell. And though brutes be admitted to be immortal, it does not follow, that they are, therefore, endued with a *rational* or *moral* nature. For any thing you know to the contrary, it may be necessary that there should be creatures in the universe without such a nature; and yet not suffer annihilation by death. How.

brutes are to be disposed of, you neither know, nor are able to know. To know this, you must know the whole system of the universe; which no finite creature can know. The objection, then, which is made against a future life, drawn from the supposition that brutes may be immortal, really amounts to nothing.

But putting brutes out of the question, let us see whether it is not very probable that death, so far from destroying our powers of reflection, will not so much as suspend their exercise.

It is plain that your powers of reason, memory, and affection, do not depend upon your body, in the *same manner* as your powers of perception by the senses. Nor do those powers of reason, memory, and affection, depend upon the body, in such a *manner*, as to give ground to think that the dissolution of the body will be their destruction or even their suspension. For you may be said to live in a state of sensation, as when you eat; and in a state of reflection, as when you think or reason. Now it is not certain that what death dissolves, is in any way necessary to you in a state of reflection, *after you have gotten ideas*: for you can and do reason intensely, after you have gotten ideas by the senses, without their help. The senses serve as hands for your mind, to get things with; but when they are gotten, it can do without them. The destruction of

your senses,—of your whole body,—does not then necessarily imply the destruction of your mind; for you can think and reason independent of your senses,—of your body.

Numbers die in full possession of their mental powers, after being worn down and wasted with a long disease; this then makes it very probable, that your mental powers may still continue in exercise, though your body be dissolved. The suspension of reason, of memory, and of the affections they excite in us, is not implied in our idea of death; for men often exercise these powers, independent of their body, up to the very last gasp. This then makes it probable, that death may not so much as interrupt the exercise of our reflecting powers. So that, as when we are born, we come into a new state, or rather into a state, which is a continuance of the one we had in the womb; so may it be with us after death, for any thing that can be proved to the contrary. Death may be but a birth to us, in which we may get vast accessions of powers; as we did when we left the womb, and came into light. It may be as natural to go into a new state of existence by death, as it is by birth.

But do not vegetables, you may say, resemble man in their decay? No, not in such a manner as to be compared; for man has mental powers, vegetables have not. Vegetables have no powers of per-

ception and action, but man has ; and it is about the continuance of these powers we are enquiring. The decay of vegetables may afford poets and orators a comparison with the decay of human life ; but not a comparison with mental powers, because they have them not.

I think, then, it is very probable, from the changes you have undergone and may undergo, and yet be still the same, that death will not annihilate you ;—that death will not destroy your powers of reflection, because they can be exercised independent of your body ;—no, nor even suspend the exercise of these powers, since death often dissolves the body when these powers are in full use. Nay I will go further still, and say, that even admitting atheism itself to be true, yet a future state is probable, and can as well be accounted for upon its principles, as that we now exist. To argue then from atheism against a future state, is to the highest degree absurd.

Since then a future state is probable, we are bound to act upon that probability just as much as if the thing were demonstrated: for if there *may* be a future state, it binds us to act as if we were *sure* there will be one.

I am yours very sincerely,

J. W.

LETTER III.

On God's Government by Rewards and Punishments.

Cheam, January, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

I SHEWED you in my last letter, that it is very probable, we shall still continue to exist in a state of life and perception after death. But merely to live, or exist after death, is a matter of little more than curiosity; if there was nothing more in the subject than the consideration of bare existence, it might indeed be a subject of speculation, but could not be one of much interest. But we are capable of much happiness or misery in this life, according to the general tenor of our conduct; and hence it is probable, that we may be happy or miserable after death, according to the nature of our actions in this world. This then makes the contemplation of another life of the highest importance to us. Let me then beg you to observe the analogy of the world on this point, and you will see, that it gives great reason to believe, that we shall be happy or miserable as we conduct ourselves here.

Now the general course of the world is, that all we enjoy, and a great part of what we suffer, is *put in our own power* : for pleasure and pain result from our actions ; and we can foresee in most cases the pleasure or pain which will follow them. We are under a law of acting to obtain pleasure even from the first moment of birth. If the child, or the man will not eat, he cannot so much as exist, setting aside the pleasure of gratifying the appetite ; so that God does not preserve our life without our own care and exertion. If you are prudent and careful, you may in general enjoy quiet and tolerable ease ; but you well know, that uneasiness, discontent, and misery, are the consequences of violent passion, envy and negligence. In general, if you want any thing, you must make exertions of some kind or other to get it. You cannot so much as eat a mouthful of bread without exertion ; and though God has given you the means of enjoyment, yet unless you will use the powers you possess, you know you must starve in the midst of plenty. So also, if you misuse your powers, and be rash, passionate, dissipated, and idle ; the consequences, in general, are sorrow, misfortune, poverty and ignorance. This you know beforehand will be the case ; and this is the general course of the world, though all our sufferings be not the result of our own folly.

Now it does not behove us to enquire whether things might not have been otherwise ; or why they are thus. We must take things as they are ; and nothing can be more plain, that, generally, imprudent conduct produces bad consequences, unhappiness and misery ; and that if we would obtain or avoid such a thing we must act so and so.

But, say you, this is to be ascribed to the general course of nature. True. But what do you mean by the general course of nature ? Is it not that course which God has appointed ? The words have no meaning, but as they are referred to him ; for you must remember, that I take it for granted, that there is a God, the natural governor of the world. Course of nature, without reference to God, are mere words ; when, therefore, you use them, they can have no meaning, but the appointment of God. If then the course of nature be the appointment of God, he appointed the misery which results from improper conduct ; and your foresight of that misery, is a warning from him, to tell you how you should act.

But though pleasure naturally accompanies the gratification of a particular passion, yet it does not follow, that you are to gratify that passion in every particular instance. Your eyes were made to see with ; but not to look at the sun till you injure your sight. Your ears were made to hear with, but not to be deafened by going too near bells when ring-

ing. So also with foreseen pleasure and pain, they were appointed, that we might act accordingly, but not that we might act improperly.

Now, since you know beforehand that pleasure will result from one kind of conduct, and pain from another kind of conduct ;—as that we shall be warm and comfortable at a proper distance from the fire, but be burnt, or suffer great pain, if we come too near it ;—it is plain, that we are under God's government in the most proper sense of the word ; and that in this life he punishes or rewards us according to our actions. God is the author of nature, i. e. of the course of the world, by supposition ; the effects then of that course must be referred to him, for the effects are but a part of the course. Indeed it is an absolute matter of fact, that we are under God's government, in the same sense as under the government of the civil magistrate ; for annexing pleasure to some actions and pain to others, which it is in our power to do or forbear, and giving us notice beforehand of this appointment, is the proper formal notion of government. If then the pain you feel, in eating or drinking too much, be intended to preserve you in health, by temperance, as it really is, this as much proves that God punishes your intemperance, and consequently that you are under his government, as if it were declared by a voice from heaven.

The analogy of nature then plainly shews, that there is nothing incredible in the general doctrine of religion, *that God will hereafter punish men according to their actions in this life*; for you now find that you are actually under a government appointed by him, which not only implies, but in which rewards and punishments are actually employed.

But still, perhaps, you may object to divine punishment; and think that there are reasons why men will not be punished after death for improper conduct in this world. But if we prosecute the analogy of the world a little more particularly, we shall find, that there is a general law of punishment in this life so analogous to what religion teaches of future punishment, as to make it very probable there will be such a thing.

Now there is a great deal of misery in the world, which men bring upon themselves by their conduct; misery which they might have prevented, and which is the natural punishment of their behaviour. Sickness, and, often, untimely death, are the general consequences of intemperance; but though there may be some pleasure, some jollity and mirth in intemperance, yet they are no advantages, no gain, compared with sickness and death, the consequences of intemperance. The advantages of dissipation will

bear no comparison with the evils it produces in this life. You see, then, that even now, in general, the punishment of improper conduct is much greater than its pleasures or advantages: and as this is the case now, the same thing, it is probable, may hold true in a future life. It is true, that the natural punishments of our improper actions do not always take place immediately; but in general they do take place at last; for the constitution of nature is such, that delay of punishment is no ground to expect final impunity. They often come all at once, and when men least expect them; nay, when they seem to have no fear of them. These punishments in many cases seem hardly probable, the probability is that men will escape them; but yet, after all, they do come with mighty force.

Apply these observations to youth, when in the University, or any where else. If they are idle, headstrong, or profligate, though they may not see the consequences of their conduct, yet in general they suffer most severely for it afterwards in life. Their habits of idleness or profligacy often prove their utter ruin; and they owe the misery of many years to the indiscretions of a very short time. Nay, in many cases, one night's debauchery will ruin a man's health and fortune for life.

In numberless cases also, if you neglect to secure

the advantages of the present moment, you never can get them afterwards. The husbandman has no crop if he neglects to sow; and if young men will not study, they must be ignorant, and in general suffer through life for their idleness. Men may indeed be guilty of folly *to a certain degree*, and yet retrieve their affairs; but there is a *limit*, which if they pass, they never can retrieve them; and sickness, poverty, and infamy are inevitable. Nay, negligence itself is often attended with consequences as fatal as any which arise from bad conduct; for many suffer sickness, declines, and an untimely death, from being negligent about damp cloaths or bedding. Civil government, you well know, is a natural thing, as are its punishments. Now some of these punishments are capital, as the effects of a dissolute life are often mortal; so that many natural punishments are final to him who incurs them, if you consider only his temporal capacity; as many civil punishments are final to him who suffers them. And these natural punishments seem inflicted by natural appointment, either to take the offender out of the way of doing further mischief, or as a warning to others; just as civil punishment is inflicted upon civil offenders.

Now these things are not accidental; they are according to general laws, by which the world is

governed. You must see, that they are so analogous to what religion teaches respecting future punishment, as to afford great ground to believe, that what religion teaches on the subject is true. And since a future state is probable, even upon the most sceptical principles, even a future state of rewards and punishments, nothing can justify a disregard of the subject. It is plain, a man may so act in this life, as to be of no use; excepting to be made an example to others, by being punished for his crimes. And if so in this life, then there is no reason for people to think, that licentious conduct will not be punished in the next.

Yours, very affectionately,

J. W.

LETTER IV.

On God's Moral Government.

Cheam, January, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

I THINK I may say with certainty, that you scarcely ever saw a watch or a clock without thinking some person had made it : so also in the world, the continual proofs which appear of final causes, lead you to believe that it was made by an intelligent maker. But you also feel pleasure and pain as the final causes of your actions : this then proves that you are under God's government : the very same kind of government which a master exercises over his servants, or a civil magistrate over his subjects.

But still this alone does not determine at first sight, that God's government is moral :—for moral government consists in rewarding the good, and punishing the bad as such ; and in an exact proportion to their personal merits or demerits. It is not at all my intention to enter into any discussion upon the moral character of the Deity. Men are too apt to indulge in speculations of this kind ; nor do they always speak with that cautious reverence which they ought upon such a subject. But let us see

whether there is not something in the course of nature which makes it probable, that God's government is moral. He has proved to us, by the course of nature, since we are here in no small degree punished or rewarded for our actions, that we are under his government as servants; and if we pursue this subject still further, we shall find, not only from the reason of the thing, and the presages of conscience, but from distinct intimations in the constitution of the world, that his government is righteous and moral.

But let me admit, as indeed I must, that the divine government under which we now are, is not the perfection of moral government: yet still it does not follow, that there is not something truly moral in it. Indeed there are some general outlines of a moral government to be seen in the world, which make it probable, that though it is not now exercised in perfection, yet it will be hereafter, when more of the divine administration shall be known and seen; and that what religion teaches us, respecting every man being either rewarded or punished according to his works, will at last take place. The principles and beginnings of a moral government may be discovered, notwithstanding all the confusion and disorder of the world.

Now it is plain from experience and fact, that, in general, less uneasiness and more satisfaction result

from a virtuous than from a vicious life ; though it certainly is difficult so to weigh pleasure and pain, as to determine the exact overplus of happiness on the side of virtue. There may certainly also be individual instances of virtuous men, from various causes, suffering more pain than pleasure ; yet still it is plain, that, on the whole, virtue is happier than vice in this world. The general effect of dissipation and profligacy, both to nations and individuals, is certainly bad ; while that of virtue is good. So that the beginnings of a righteous administration, are unquestionably to be found in nature, if we will attentively enquire after them. But let me be more particular.

Now, first, you know it is a plain matter of fact, that you are under God's government, as a servant under his master, or a subject under the magistrate ; for he now punishes, in the natural course of things, bad actions, and rewards good ones. This then gives ground to suppose, that he is also a moral governor. And as it is a fact, that God governs men according to a *settled* rule, or method of rewards and punishments ; what reason have you to suppose he will not finally reward or punish you by a *particular* rule, namely, as you have been virtuous or vicious ? We seem naturally to think, that men in this life should be rewarded or punished according to their conduct ; this then may be fairly considered as an in-

tinuation to us by the Deity, that it will be perfectly so hereafter, since our minds are so formed that we think this rule the only proper one. The rule of distributive justice unavoidably appears to us more natural than any other: whether then the evidence for religion be more or less clear, still the expectation, which that evidence raises in us, that upon the whole the righteous will be happy, and the wicked miserable, ought not to be thought chimerical, since this appears to us most natural. Indeed this is only expecting, that the same system of rewarding and punishing, which we now see exists, will be perfectly carried on hereafter by the particular rule of distributive justice, which appears to us more proper than any other rule.

But, secondly, do not parents punish children, when they act improperly, both for their own sake, and for the sake of example? You know that this must always form a part of right education. Now look at the general course of things, and it is plain that tranquillity, satisfaction, and external advantages, are the natural consequences of prudence, in our affairs; and that many inconveniences and sufferings, result naturally from rashness, profligate negligence, and folly; which evidently shews a right constitution of nature. And since, then, God governs the world by general fixed laws, and has given

us capacities of reflecting upon them, and of foreseeing the good and bad consequences of our prudence or imprudence, i. e. in a degree, of our virtue and vice ; this shews that we are under a moral government, and that our virtue and vice are rewarded and punished as such.

But, thirdly, you know that, in a great degree, vicious conduct is punished as being mischievous to society ; and that bad men, whose crimes deserve civil punishment, are much afraid of a discovery ; and that this fear is no small punishment to them. Now the fear which such men feel, is a natural protest against their crimes ; it shews, that society cannot suffer their conduct, because of its *necessary* evil tendency. The crimes of falsehood, injustice, and cruelty, must be punished by society, *as being* destructive of itself ; to punish these things is natural to society, and is therefore an instance of a kind of moral government naturally established, and actually taking place in the world. You see, then, that you are unavoidably under a kind of moral government in society. But this kind of government is natural, and therefore was appointed by God, though carried on by the instrumentality of men. And since you are, then, unavoidably made accountable, by God, for your actions here as they are in themselves ; this makes it probable, that you

must be accountable for your actions hereafter as they are in themselves.

Nor is it any objection to this, that sometimes good actions are punished, and bad ones rewarded; for this is not necessarily the case, and consequently is unnatural. Good actions are never punished, nor bad ones rewarded, as such. Any punishing of good, or rewarding of bad actions is accidental; it is not the natural order of things, for society is under as great a necessity of punishing bad actions as such; as being mischievous,—as we are necessitated to eat that we may live.

But further, put civil society out of the question, and examine the natural course of things; and you will find that virtue, as such, is actually rewarded; and vice, as such, punished. And as this is the case, it shews us that there is a moral government, in the strickest sense, begun and established upon earth; though not in that degree of perfection which revelation teaches us to expect hereafter. But to see this clearly, you must distinguish between an action and its quality of virtue or vice. Many actions simply of themselves, such as the gratifying a natural passion, naturally produce pleasure, independent of their moral character: while on the other hand, an action, as it is virtuous or vicious, produces pleasure or uneasiness. Now examine your own feelings and experience, and you will find

that virtue, as such, produces great advantages ; and vice, as such, disadvantages. When you do a thing which you know is wrong, it produces uneasiness ; and, on the other hand, the practice of virtue, gives you complacency of mind. And let me ask you, whether any disadvantage is so great, as internal disquietude ; or any advantage so great, as peace of mind ? Now, it is plain, this happiness or unhappiness of the mind, arises from the consideration of the virtue or vice of your conduct ; and is, therefore, a proof, that you are under a moral government.

Why are good men in general confided and trusted in, but for the sake of their virtue ; and bad men distrusted and suspected, but because of their vice ? Why do you resent injuries, but on account of the *wrong* that is in them ? Why do you reward and punish children, but on account of the propriety or impropriety of their behaviour ? And in civil punishments, in general, the morality of the action is considered for which punishment is inflicted ; for even in killing a man, which is the same, considering simply the fact, whether it be done by accident or from malice, the perpetrator is not put to death unless design be proved. It is plain then that God has given us a moral nature, and therefore that we are under a moral government ;—it is plain that vice, as such, is punished, and virtue, as such, rewarded in this

world;—and hence it is probable, that after death there will be a continuance of the same system, and that it will be carried to perfection.

But whence is it, say you, that virtue, as such, is often rewarded; and vice, as such, is punished, and this rule never inverted? Why, but because God has given man a moral nature; and, in addition to this, has given us great power over each other's happiness and misery. For, first, we are so constituted, that well doing, as such, at least in some instances, gives us satisfaction; ill doing, as such, in none. And secondly, since God has given us a moral nature, and has put our happiness and misery much in each other's power, it must follow, that in most instances vice, as such, will be infamous, and men will be disposed to punish it, as in itself detestable. You must regard veracity, justice, charity, or in a word virtue, as being right or reasonable in themselves. But there is no such thing as a like natural regard for falsehood, injustice, or cruelty; for though an instance could be found of a regard for vice, as such, a thing, I believe, impossible, yet it would plainly be monstrous and unnatural; and would not therefore invalidate the general observation. It is evident then from the frame of our nature, which God has given us, and from our happiness being so much in each other's power, that virtue, as such, must be favoured by us, and must

tend to make us happy; while vice, as such, must be discouraged, and must tend to make us miserable. And since, then, we have an evident declaration in our constitution, that God is on the side of virtue, he who practises it must have a sense of security, and an implicit hope of somewhat after death.

Now consider, my young friend, what is the *necessary* tendency of virtue, and you will see that it confirms this hope. In virtue there is a *necessary* tendency to produce good, and in vice bad effects, to a much higher degree than takes place in fact. There is not a doubt but good men would be much more rewarded, and bad men much more punished, than they are, if it were not for *accidental* causes; there is no doubt, but men guilty of crimes would be much more punished than they are, if justice was not artificially eluded. Extend this observation from individuals to society, and you will see, that virtue has a *necessary* tendency when directing the power of society, to overcome power not under the direction of virtue; in like manner as power directed by reason, has a tendency to prevail over brute force. Is it not reason that gives man the superiority over brutes? for it seems more than probable, that the sum of all the brute force in the world is greater than the sum of human force. But the superiority of reason is *necessary*; of itself it tends to give pre-eminence over irrational animals. So also is the tendency

of power directed by virtue, over power directed by vice.

But let us pursue this tendency of reason a little more particularly, that we may see more clearly how the case stands with virtue. Now in the case of reason, length of time, proper scope, and opportunity, and other circumstances may be necessary for it, before it can prevail over brute force. There must be some proportion of power united with reason to the opposing power of brutes. For if you suppose ten rational and ten irrational creatures of like shape, and manner, and strength, it is evident, that at first the rational might have no superiority over the irrational; and that it would require time and union to give them any very decided advantage. Suppose also, that a number of men were landed on an island very full of wild beasts; a number sufficient to overcome the beasts and establish themselves; yet it is very plain that sickness, want of union, and many other things, might prevent them from overcoming the beasts, and that they themselves might be extirpated.

Suppose further, that ten unarmed men, in an open plain, were attacked by a hundred lions, would their reason give them the superiority? It certainly, in such a case, could not. Rational animals then have not a *necessary* superiority over irrational without due concurrent circumstances; for though rea-

son in itself naturally tends to prevail over brute force, yet there must be concurring circumstances to enable it to prevail. So also in society, virtue has a like tendency to procure superiority and additional power; but it must possess a due concurrence of circumstances.

Now suppose that things beyond death are analogous to things in this life, and that our state in the next world will be a continuance of the moral system we experience here; then the natural tendency of that power which is directed by virtue will be, ultimately to prevail over that power which is not directed by it; as is the natural tendency of reason to prevail over brute force. But then, in order to prevail, virtue must have some due proportion of power, of time, and of a fair trial to produce its effect. Virtue has not its full scope in this world; but there may be scenes in eternity, in which it may operate to its entire extent; in which its tendency may receive due concurring circumstances, and its power and energy be complete over all opposition. Indeed you may easily conceive in your own mind, how amazing would be the power and happiness of a large kingdom, in which *absolute* virtue directed every thing. I will not attempt to describe the effects of such a state of things; but only picture to yourself a monarch *perfectly* virtuous, all his officers

the same, all his people the same, and that this held good for ages; and you must feel assured, that such a nation would not only be happy in itself, but would communicate happiness to others in a way which the world has never yet seen. Such then being the tendency of virtue, and such its results, if it had due scope, it is plain the present constitution of things is of a moral nature.

But you may say, may not things go on hereafter as they do now? May not virtue be sometimes depressed, and vice be sometimes prosperous? Now to this I answer, that I am not properly proving God's *perfect* moral government, nor the truth of religion; but shewing what there is in the course of nature to *confirm* the proper proof of religion, which I suppose to be known. But let it be granted, that pleasure and pain are to a high degree distributed among men without any regard to their character; then the course of nature would not afford ground of hope or fear, that men would be rewarded or punished hereafter. Yet, granting this, you would have no ground to think that vice would have the advantage; and then the doctrine of a future state of retribution would rest upon the usual known arguments, which after all are unanswerable. But still these arguments receive force from the observations I have made; for these observations shew, first, that God is not indifferent to virtue and vice, as such;—that

he has given a decided preference to the former over the latter ;—and that from the course of nature it is probable, the righteous will ultimately have the advantage over the wicked.

They shew, secondly, that when hereafter God shall reward virtue and punish vice, as such ; or, according to religion, shall reward every man according to his works ; this will be the same thing in *kind*, though different in degree, as that which takes place in this world. That it will be the completion of that moral government, of which the principles and beginnings are now clear in the course of this world. They shew, thirdly, that as we have reason, from the natural government of the world, to expect future rewards and punishments ; so also that God, as a moral governor, will reward virtue and punish vice hereafter, to a much higher degree than we now experience. And, lastly, they shew, that since the necessary tendency of virtue is to good, and of vice to evil ; and since the hindrances to the effects of virtue are but *accidental*, it is very probable that the necessary tendencies will remain : and hence, that virtue will be rewarded, and vice punished, according to the perfection of moral government. But *when*, or *where*, or in what particular manner, can be known only by revelation.

Upon the whole, God's moral government is implied in his natural government. Virtue and vice

are rewarded and punished as such in society. A moral scheme is natural; it is a matter of fact actually begun upon earth. God has hereby given a declaration for virtue, and against vice; and hence there is just ground for supposing, that he will hereafter perfect the scheme he has begun. The tendency of virtue to good, and of vice to evil, is in fact the voice of God, informing you what will be hereafter; and which voice I hope you will regard as if you heard it by your ears.

I am yours,

J. W.

LETTER V.

On our present Life being a State of Trial and Probation.

Cheam, January, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

YOU well know that religion teaches us, that we are here in a state of trial or probation for a future life. Now this general doctrine contains many particulars; such as, that our future interest depends on ourselves;—that in this life we have scope and opportunity for that good and bad behaviour, which God will reward or punish hereafter; and that we have temptations to vice, and the inducements of reason to virtue;—in fact, that we are under God's moral government, and must be accountable to him for our actions. But in particular, probation means allurements to vice, or to what is wrong; it implies difficulty in adhering to what is right; that we may miscarry through the force of temptation; and that we are exposed to trial and danger. Let us then see, whether we are not in a state of probation with respect to temporal matters, similar to what religion teaches us in spiritual. And if the two cases can be shewn to be analogous, which they certainly may,

then all objection to a state of trial in a religious sense must vanish ; for you must not forget, that I suppose the course of nature is the appointment of God.

Now, as you are under God's natural government of rewards and punishments in this life, this as much implies natural trial and probation for this world, as his moral government implies moral trial for a future life. I need not tell you, that your future advantages in life depend much upon your present application to study ; or in other words, that much of your happiness or misery depends upon yourself. And this you know also is the case with all men, according to their condition in life. But are you not often allured from your studies by company, by pleasure, and many other things? Things which you may and can overcome if you will ; but which evidently are a trial to you. And if you will look around you, all men will appear more or less subject to trial in their temporal affairs. *Setting religion then out of the question*, you know that many suffer great misery in their worldly capacity through their own fault. But, say you, they were allured into their conduct,—they were drawn by company, by pleasure ; they were imprudent, and were exposed to danger. True: this is the state of man in his worldly affairs ; and to possess any tolerable ease and happiness he must be prudent. This then

plainly shews, that in temporals, we are in a state analogous to our moral and religious trial; for to possess future happiness we must be religious. We are exposed to difficulty and danger as well in the one as the other.

But let me call your attention to this point a little more particularly. Now I may lay it down as a certainty, that your temporal happiness, generally speaking, depends much upon your prudence or due management of yourself; and that your trial, either in a religious or temporal sense, must be somewhat in your *external circumstances*, or in your *nature*. Now, if a man of general prudence and good conduct do an imprudent thing, through the force of a strong particular temptation, you attribute his fault to that temptation or external circumstance: but if a man act improperly by habit, or the indulgence of any passion; as in habits of drunkenness and debauchery, you attribute his conduct to his habits or passions. But those habits or passions, that are improper, are as much a temptation to act inconsistently with our temporal interest as to act viciously. They serve to injure us in our present good, as religion teaches us they do with respect to our future. It is, indeed, certain, that there must be something, even in prudent men, which coincides with external temptation when they yield to it. And when men are misled by their ha-

bits and passions, there must be objects to excite and gratify those habits and passions; and hence temptations from within, and from without, coincide and mutually imply each other. Since, then, this is the case, and a man hurts his temporal happiness, by the improper indulgence of his passions, it is plain, that self-denial is as necessary for your worldly advantage as for your future, and that you are in a like state of trial in both respects. It is plain, that excess endangers your present prosperity as well as everlasting peace. We have passions which we may gratify innocently, and also improperly: but if we gratify them improperly we hurt our worldly interest. And hence it follows that our passions are temptations, are trials to us in a temporal point of view; and often make us lose a greater worldly good, for a very short indulgence. And is not all this like what religion teaches? Is it not analogous to that which she informs us respecting men, who forego future glory for present vicious practices and enjoyments.

Look also at the behaviour of men, both in a religious and temporal view, and you will find it very analogous. Some care nothing about consequences; give them the pleasures of to-day, and they seem to care nothing for their peace in the latter part of life. Others see their temporal ruin; but their bad

habits have such an ascendancy over them, that they still proceed in their course till poverty and absolute want come upon them; and some glory in their extravagance, dissipation, and debauchery. And do not men do the same in religious as in temporal matters? Their conduct is often similar in both respects. Indeed the man, whose conduct *naturally* ruins his temporal good, is always wrong in religion.

I may add also, that as our religious interest, so also our temporal is often endangered by others. Bad education, bad company, false maxims, and fashions, which are all extraneous, injure our present happiness, and also most seriously affect our future. In fine, your difficulties and dangers, i. e. your trials, in your temporal and religious capacity, since they proceed from the same causes, and have the same effect upon your behaviour, are evidently analogous, and of the same kind.

In concluding this letter, I may add, that there is no doubt, but we are an inferior part of creation; for we bear evident marks of degradation. Nor are we in the best condition that *might* be imagined for securing our present or future interest. But yet we have no right to complain; for with moderate care we may pass our days on earth in tolerable quiet. And in religion we need not miscarry, unless we

will ; there is nothing put upon us but what we may bear and do, which is evidently equitable : so that we have no more reason to complain of the want of higher advantages, than the dog would have to complain of the want of the eagle's wings. Whatever difficulties, then, may be stated about our being placed in a state of danger or hazard, the fact is, that we are so placed. And as much of our happiness or misery here depends on ourselves, and since the various ills which result from neglect and folly, might in general be avoided by care and prudence, it follows that the state of moral trial, which religion teaches, is rendered credible by the natural state of trial in which we are placed in our temporal affairs.

Had your worldly happiness been altogether *independent* of your own conduct, you might have had an objection against the doctrine of your future welfare *depending* upon it. But you see, that your temporal advantage does depend upon your conduct ; why then may not your future advantage ? You cannot pass through life, with any tolerable comfort to yourself, nor can you be endured by others, without considerable self-denial on your part. What right, then, have you to expect everlasting happiness without self-denial ? No fair objection, therefore, can lie against the doctrine of probation, as implying danger or hazard.

Hoping your conduct will be such as to lead to
your present and future welfare,

I am, yours, very sincerely,

J. W.

LETTER VI.

*On our present Life being a State of Moral
Discipline.*

Cheam, February, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

IT must, indeed, be acknowledged, that we are not able fully to explain, nor perhaps to comprehend, *how* we came to be placed in a state of probation of so much difficulty and hazard: but still, our present condition cannot be shewn to be inconsistent with the perfect moral government of God; and religion teaches us, as you know, that we are placed in this state of probation, that by virtue and piety we may be qualified for a future state. Now though this, which religion teaches us, be but a partial answer to the enquiry, how we came to be placed in a state of such hazard; yet it is a very satisfactory answer to another enquiry, of much greater moment to us, viz. what is our business here? The known end, then, of our being placed in our present condition, is our improvement in virtue and piety; as a requisite qualification for a future state of security and happiness. And we shall find our temporal state to be very similar.

Now, first, what is the beginning of life, but an education for mature age? Why do you learn so many things in youth, but for the use and business of after life? And in the same manner, this life may be a state of moral discipline or preparation for another. It is evident, that every species of creatures is designed for a particular way of life; and that its nature and external circumstances are adapted to that way of life. The dog, the cow, and the dromedary, are fitted each to a particular way of life, and their *manner* of living is adapted to it. So is it with all other species of creatures; and particularly with man. But you may easily conceive of a man's powers both of body and mind being so changed, as to render him altogether incapable of *human* life. Our nature and external condition must correspond; and without this correspondence there can be no such thing as human life and human happiness. Your life and happiness then are a *result* from your nature and condition jointly. Since, then, you must here have a particular nature, so as to enjoy human life, so also you must have some particular, some necessary character and qualifications to enjoy the life;—the employment and happiness of good men hereafter. You do not think a man fit for keeping accounts who cannot write, nor a man fit for an orator who cannot speak; for in both cases there must be *previous necessary quali-*

fications. Why, then, may it not be necessary, that a character should be formed in this world; without which men could not enjoy, nor be fit for the employment and happiness of the just and good in a future state?

But, secondly, if you examine the constitution of human, nay of all creatures, you will find them capable of naturally becoming qualified for states of life, for which they were once wholly unqualified. The faculties of every species of creatures known to us are made for enlargement; and for the acquirements of experience and habits. And man in particular has not only the power of perception and of obtaining knowledge, but also of retaining his perceptions and knowledge by means of memory. You are capable not only of acting in a certain way, but of getting a *new facility* of acting in that way: and you are capable not only of momentary impressions, but also of settled alterations in your temper or character; for a man may not only be intoxicated by accident, but may become an habitual drunkard, and hence introduce an entire change in his whole manners and behaviour; and on the other hand, he may acquire such a habit of sobriety, though once dissipated, as to have a fixed dislike to every degree of intemperance. Indeed, every faculty you possess, is capable of great improvement by exercise or habit. Your reason and memory; your eye sight,

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hearing, and feeling; and all your powers, both of body and mind, may be made much more vigorous and acute, by use and employment; so that you may get habits both of perception and of action.

But let me consider more particularly habits of body and of mind, and you will see, that the former will assist us much to explain the latter. Now how is it, that men get habits of body, such as graceful or ungraceful motions, expertness in tumbling, leaping, or horsemanship, &c. but by repeated external acts or trials? And in like manner, by carrying inward practical principles into action, men get habits of life and conduct; such as obedience to authority, justice, truth, and charity; and too often get bad habits of malice, envy, and revenge. By exercise, men get habits of attention, industry, and self-government; and by indulgence in outward act, or in thought and intention, which is inward act, men get habits of doing wrong, and of becoming a prey to their passions. Resolving to do well, and endeavouring to enforce upon ourselves and upon others a practical sense of virtue, are evidently virtuous acts, and tend to produce good habits. But I must here particularly remind you, that it is not merely going over the theory of virtue in your thoughts that will form a habit of it: nay, it may have quite the contrary effect; for passive

impressions, or thoughts which pass often through the mind, are less sensibly felt.

For what makes people less sensible to their own mortality, than often seeing people die? The sexton of a church, and a hangman, in general, feel their own mortality less than other men; though they have more to do with death. A person also, who has from infancy been on board of a man of war, has much less sense of danger both on the ocean and in battle, than one who has made but one voyage. The thing might also be illustrated by a surgeon and many other professions. Since, then, *practical* habits are formed and strengthened by repeated acts, and *passive impressions* grow weaker by being often repeated; it follows, that active habits may be increasing by acting upon certain motives, whilst these very motives are less sensibly felt. Indeed experience confirms this; for those, who are often exposed to danger, in general, get habits of caution, though they feel less of fear. Good men also, who very frequently see cases of distress, have by degrees less of the *feeling* of pity; though their exertions to relieve distress actually increase. And though their often seeing others die, makes them more active in preparing for death, yet it certainly makes them feel their own mortality less.

Thus, then, it is plain, that by accustoming yourself to any course of action, you may get an apt.

ness, a readiness, and often pleasure in it. Your disinclination to it grows weaker; its difficulties in your estimation grow less, and the reasons for it offer themselves more readily, and operate more constantly. Practical principles also, absolutely in themselves, grow stronger by exercise, and also obtain an ascendancy over opposite principles: and thus a new character may, in several respects, be formed; and many habitudes of life may be made, which were not given by nature, but which nature directs us to acquire.

But, thirdly, according to the present course of nature, your power of improvement is absolutely necessary in your temporal capacity. You are not qualified *wholly* by nature, much less *all at once* for a mature state of life. Strength of understanding as well as of body must be acquired by exercise. Nor would a person, if left to himself, be at first much better than an idiot, if he were brought into the world with all his powers of body and mind in maturity. He would not know how to use his senses, but by experience or habit; and he would have to learn how to see, and hear, and feel; and would need discipline and tuition to render him capable of self-government and moderation, or even of being sufferable to others. We are evidently, then, left by nature in what may be called an unfinished state; and must have the acquirements of know-

ledge, experience, and of habits, to be fit for mature life in this world. And as we need these things, so we have, in the course of nature, to go through the different stages of infancy, childhood, and youth, to acquire them. What was the business of infancy but learning the use of your senses, and of the various things with which you were to be connected in future life? The subordination of childhood and youth, prepared you for submission to civil authority; and you learnt by experience to avoid the dangers of fire and water, &c. If people be intended for hard and dangerous situations in the world, we naturally suppose they should be educated accordingly; and you know, from the experience you have had in life, that if the former part of life be ill-managed, the latter generally turns out ill. It is indeed a matter of fact, that the early part of life is an important opportunity for preparing for the latter; and if this opportunity be lost it cannot be recovered.

Why, then, may not this life, be a state of education for a future one? What we must go through in our temporal capacity, is evidently analogous to what religion teaches respecting our spiritual: and though we could not tell how this world is a preparation for another, yet this would be no fair objection against its being so; for it is only by experience you know that your food and sleep invigorate the

body, and since you could not know this excepting by experience, you have no ground for supposing this world is not a state of moral discipline for another. Children, also, little think how necessary their sports and discipline are to them, and yet both are necessary; for without them they would be unhealthy, and unfit for future business. Supposing, then, a future state, we ourselves are but children; and though we could not tell how the present life could be a preparation for another, yet still the general analogy of the course of nature would make it probable *that it is*.

In my fourth letter I shewed you that God's government of the world is moral; and hence that virtue and piety are a necessary qualification for a future state: and if so, then the present life may be a preparation for it. *For since we want and are capable of improvement in virtue and piety, by moral and religious habits; then the present life is fit to be a state of discipline for such improvement;* in like manner, as I have already observed, that infancy, childhood, and youth, are a necessary preparation, and a natural state of discipline for mature age.

Now it is evident from our natural capacity of habits, that we are *capable* of moral improvement; and that we *want* it, is plain from the wickedness of mankind. Nor do we need moral improvement

merely because of excess in the gratification of our propensities, but because of those very propensities themselves. For those propensities give us the capacity of excess, and therefore imply danger of deviating from what is right; and hence we stand in need of virtuous habits for a security against this danger. The objects which are naturally suited to our desires naturally excite those desires, whether we can gratify them lawfully or not; and hence we need the security of virtuous habits in addition to a moral principle within, that what we cannot lawfully enjoy may make a less impression upon us.

Habits of vice, as every one knows, render men an easier prey to their passions; and on the contrary, habits of virtue give greater security to virtue. But time and opportunity are necessary for the formation of habits; and therefore this world may be a state of preparation for a future life; since it affords time and opportunity for the formation of those habits of piety and virtue, which are necessary for forming the character of a good man. If you examine the state of the present world, you will find, that it is peculiarly fit to be a state of discipline, to those who will set themselves to mend and improve. If we duly reflect upon the temptations of life, the wickedness of mankind, and the pains and sorrows to which we are liable, they have all a direct tendency to bring us to a settled moderation and reason-

ableness of temper. The very circumstance of our being in a state of danger tends to produce, when properly considered, a higher degree of practical piety in some things, than if we felt no danger. It tends to make us very watchful, and self denying. Indeed this life affords great scope for the exercise of patience, resignation, charity, truth, and justice ; and hence for the formation of habits of the highest virtue. It gives full room not only for what may be called the active, but also for the passive virtues ; and hence for the formation of a character of universal benevolence, and of entire submission to the divine sovereignty.

In concluding this letter, I may say it is plain, that though in our temporal capacity we have the power of being fitted for mature age, yet we are not fitted so immediately by nature ; nor can we be so fitted, unless we pass through various stages of discipline and improvement, and exert ourselves to obtain the necessary acquirements. And is not all this analogous to that which religion teaches us, respecting this world being a state of discipline for another ? The general course of nature is, not to save us trouble or danger, but to make us capable of going through them ; and we experience as a matter of fact, that *what we were to be*, was to be the effect of *what we would do*. You do not expect a man to be a musician, who never practised

music ; nor to obtain any acquirement in temporals without exertion and application. So also, in piety and virtue, experience and habits are the *natural* supply to our deficiencies, and security against our dangers. The general law of our nature is, that if we will not improve ourselves, and take the pains to acquire those things which fit us for mature age, and keep them when they are acquired, we must remain deficient and wretched. It is, therefore, perfectly credible, from the analogy of nature, that the same may be our case with respect to the happiness of a future state, and the qualifications necessary for it.

Yours very sincerely,

J. W.

LETTER VII.

*On the Doctrine of Necessity as influencing
Practice.*

Cheam, February, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

IN my former letters I have shewn you, that our present temporal condition is very similar to what religion teaches us, respecting our being designed for another world. But says a Fatalist, the doctrine of universal necessity is reconcileable with the course of the world; and therefore man is not responsible for his conduct: well, let him say so; and let us for the sake of argument admit, that the doctrine of necessity is reconcileable with the course of the world; yet it will appear that the doctrine of necessity, if reconcileable with the course of the world, is also reconcileable with religion, and the proofs upon which religion rests; and that man is responsible for his conduct. It will appear that even a Fatalist has no ground to conclude, that there is no such thing as religion.

You, no doubt, remember, that I have all along supposed, that there is an intelligent author of na-

ture, or natural governor of the world. But, perhaps, it may be imagined that the doctrine of necessity is an objection to this:—let us, first, then, consider this objection, and we shall find that it amounts to nothing; and then, secondly, consider, whether it destroys the proof of their being a moral governor of the world, or of our being in a state of religion.

Now, when a Fatalist asserts, that all things happen by necessity, and could not be otherwise, yet this necessity does not exclude our deliberation, choice, and preference; for we are as conscious that we exercise deliberation, choice, and preference, as we are that we exist. Hence, then, you must perceive, that necessity will not alone and of itself explain *how* things came *to be* and to *continue* as they are; but merely accounts for *this circumstance*, that things could not have been otherwise than they are and have been. When, therefore, a Fatalist says, that every thing is by necessity, this is not an answer to the question, whether the world came into being as it is, by means of an intelligent agent; but is an answer to quite another question, viz. whether it came into being *necessarily* or *freely*.

For suppose a Fatalist, and one who thought himself a free agent, were disputing about their respective opinions, and that they instanced a house

in the progress of their argument : they would both agree it was built by an architect ; their only difference would be, that the Fatalist would say, the architect built it *necessarily* ; the other, that he built it *freely*. Suppose, then, that from the instance of a house, they proceeded to the instance of the world ; the Fatalist would be obliged to acknowledge an agent in its formation, though he might hold that this agent acted by necessity. An agent, I say, a Fatalist must acknowledge ; for we can no more divest ourselves of the idea of something being infinite and eternal, than we can suppose two and two make five : and hence, from the scantiness of language, we say that God exists *necessarily*. But it cannot be intended by the Fatalist, that every thing exists, as it is, by that kind of necessity, which is antecedent in nature to design ; for we see it as a daily matter of fact, that *design* in the actions of men, makes many *alterations* in nature. And should any person deny this, I certainly shall not argue with him ; for if all things exist, as they are, by the same kind of necessity, by which we say the Deity exists, then *design* in men's actions cannot produce any alteration in nature : but design in men's actions does produce alterations in nature, and therefore I would never pretend to argue with one who denied it.

Hence, then, it follows, *first*, that when a Fa-

talist asserts that every thing is by *necessity*, he must mean, though I know he would not chuse to mean it, that every thing is *by an agent acting necessarily*: and, *secondly*, that necessity does not exclude intelligence and design in the agent. Suppose, then, the doctrine of necessity true, and it accounts for the formation of the world just as much as it accounts for the formation of a house, and no more. Necessity as much requires a necessary agent, as freedom requires a free agent in the formation of the world; and the *design* and *final causes* that we see in the world, as clearly prove choice and intelligence, in the designer, upon the scheme of necessity, as upon the scheme of freedom.

Since, then, the doctrine of necessity does not destroy the proof of there being a God,—the governor of the world; let us see, supposing such a doctrine possible, whether it be not also reconcileable with religion. Now I will put a particular case, which may easily be made general. Suppose, then, that you had been educated by a Fatalist; and that you had been made to believe, when a child, that you were not in any respect a subject of blame or commendation; nor for any thing deserved, reward or punishment. Now, suppose further, that you had acted upon this principle; the consequence must have been, that you would have been the

plague of all around you, and your own tormentor, if not destroyer. You must have been continually corrected, that you might have a *practical* impression of your accountableness, though you did not believe you were accountable. Your school-master would not have taken your doctrine of necessity as a plea for idleness, mischief, and stubbornness; nor the farmers as a plea for robbing orchards, and treading down the corn. Your college tutor would not admit it as a defence for bad conduct; nor would any one you might injure ever listen to it. Let it, then, be admitted, that the doctrine of necessity is true; yet in practical and common life it does not destroy man's responsibility: for men are and must be punished for improper conduct. It cannot be applied so as to destroy man's accountableness in the affairs of this world. And if, then, it cannot be applied, so as to destroy your accountableness in the affairs of common life, you have no right to suppose it can be applied, so as to destroy your accountableness in religion. You are evidently treated, in the present general government of the world, as if you were free, whether you are so or not: the constitution of the world is such, that men must be accountable to one another for their actions; so that the doctrine of necessity will not apply, so as to destroy our responsibility in this life.

But if ever a man does attempt to apply it in his temporal capacity, it always misleads him in the most dreadful manner. And since this is the case with your present temporal concerns, you have, therefore, no ground to conclude that the doctrine of necessity, admitting it to be true, frees you from accountableness in matters of religion. You cannot apply the doctrine to the practical affairs of life; you have then no ground to apply it to religion, which is in all respects a practical thing. Indeed the doctrine of necessity is not applicable to practical subjects;—it is with respect to them as if it were not true; and hence the doctrine of necessity does not at all destroy the system of religion.

But, further, you know and are conscious that you have a will and a disposition, which determine you to act in a certain manner. If then the doctrine of necessity be true, this is reconcileable with it; because it is a mere matter of fact, that you have this will and disposition. And if it be reconcileable with fate in you, it is also reconcileable with fate in the author of nature. And since necessity no more prevents men from being benevolent than cruel, true than faithless, just than unjust, or if the Fatalist pleases, what we call unjust; you have, therefore, no reason to suppose, that it prevents the Deity from possessing the cha-

racter of truth, justice, and benevolence; which character is the foundation of religion. But you may, perhaps, say, that though the doctrine of necessity, if it be reconcileable with any thing, is reconcileable with that character in the Deity, of truth, justice, and benevolence, which is the foundation of religion; yet does it not destroy the proof that he is of that character? and consequently the proof of religion? No. For our happiness and misery are not our fate in any manner, so as *not* to be the consequences of our behaviour; for they *are* the consequences of our behaviour. God does govern us as a father his children; and as a magistrate his subjects, i. e. with truth and justice; and, therefore, truth and justice are the natural rule, by which he exercises his government; and, therefore, he is of that character, which is the foundation of religion.

But let me prosecute this subject a little more. Now it is a matter of fact that we have a moral faculty, by which we approve some actions, and disapprove others, as they are in themselves; it is also a matter of fact, that God, supposing there is an intelligent author and governor of the world, does govern the world by rewards and punishments, according to our conduct; it is also a matter of fact, that he has so constituted our nature and the course of things, as to tell us *he will* reward or punish

us in this manner in our temporal capacity; and hence we have ground to suppose he will finally reward or punish men after death by the same rule, and according to their deserts. It is also evident that the tendency of vice is bad, and of virtue good; and hence, that God, in the natural course of Providence, punishes vicious actions as such, and as mischievous to society. So that admitting the doctrine of necessity to be true, yet if we argue from what we see in the world, it is no objection to the general proof of religion.

In addition to all this, consider the history of what may be called natural religion, and you will find, that something of it has been known in all ages;—that the belief of one God, the creator and moral governor of the world, and of mankind being in a state of religion, was received in the first ages;—and that there is express evidence of history, as far as history goes, that this was taught first by revelation. This history then of religion, whether the doctrine of necessity be true or false, is a real confirmation of the truth of religion; and the *external* evidence, even of natural religion, is very considerable.

But says a Fatalist, though I cannot answer your particular argument drawn from probability, yet if I can prove your system wrong, for which you employ that reasoning, I need not be anxious about

your particular argument. The method, says he, of rewarding good, and punishing bad actions, as such, must go upon the supposition that we are free and not necessary agents: and it is incredible to suppose that the author of nature would govern us upon a supposition as true, which he knows to be false; and therefore absurd to think he will reward or punish us hereafter for our actions, especially as being of good or ill desert:

Here then I come to a point with the Fatalist; and the answer to him is full, and not to be evaded. Now the whole course of nature, the whole analogy of providence, shews that this conclusion, viz. that we are not accountable for our actions, is false; wherever the fallacy lies. The doctrine of freedom shews where the fallacy lies, viz. in supposing ourselves *necessary* when we are *free* agents: and supposing the doctrine of necessity true; the fallacy lies in supposing it incredible, that necessary agents should be rewarded or punished. For daily facts assure us, even upon the supposition of necessity not being incredible, that necessary agents should be punished. For, in the natural course of things, God governs even the brutes by the method of rewards and punishments: and as for men, it is matter of constant experience, that by the instrumentality of each other they are rewarded or punished according to the nature of their actions; that

they are punished for vicious actions, as such, and as being hurtful to society, whether they are free or necessary agents. If then we admit that men are necessary agents, yet since it is a matter of fact that they are in this life punished for vicious actions as such, it is not incredible that they may be accountable for their conduct hereafter.

Upon the whole, then, I think it must be clear to you, that supposing the doctrine of necessity possible, and reconcileable with the course of nature; yet it by no means proves that God will not finally make men happy or miserable according as in this world they have behaved well or ill. The whole analogy of nature shews, that the doctrine of necessity considered practically is false; and that if necessity be reconcileable with the course of nature, yet it does not destroy the proof of natural religion, nor make any alteration in the proof of revealed.

Hoping, therefore, you will never forget your accountableness to your Creator, for every part of your conduct.

I am yours very affectionately,

J. W.

LETTER VIII.

On the Government of God being an incomprehensible Scheme.

Cheam, March, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH it be plain that the analogy of nature gives great credibility to religion in general, and also to all its parts as matters of fact; and also shews, that if we even admit the doctrine of necessity to be true, still we are accountable for our actions: yet objections may be made against the wisdom and equity, the goodness and method of the divine government, as implied in the notion of religion. Nor will analogy give a *direct* answer to such objections; for the credibility of a fact proved by analogy does not directly prove any thing concerning its wisdom and goodness;—and therefore analogy will only *directly* shew a thing credible as a matter of fact. But do you admit that there is a moral government over the world; and then analogy will shew, that this moral government must be a system, not only distinguished from, but comprehending many particulars: and also, that it is a system, of which we

are so ignorant, as to make it very unreasonable for us to object against its justice and goodness, either in whole or in part. In this point of view, then, analogy will be *remotely* of great use in answering objections.

Now I have already shewn you in a former letter, that God's government over the world is moral; let us then now take this for granted, and the analogy of nature will make it plain, that this moral government must be a system quite beyond our comprehension; and hence, that objections against its wisdom, justice, and goodness, are unreasonable.

Now the course of nature, or the natural government of the world, is evidently a system; whose parts fit, and are adapted to each other, just as the parts of a watch, or a civil government. In this great system, individuals have peculiar and various relations to others of the same species; as man to man, husband to wife, parents to children, masters to servants, magistrates to subjects, &c. Whole species are also variously related to other species upon earth; as horses and cattle for the use of man, sheep dogs to sheep, and hounds to the fox or the hare, &c. Nor do we know how far these relations may extend. Nor is there any one action or event, which we know, that is so single and unconnected, as not to have a relation to some other actions and

events. So that it is possible each action or event may have a natural and remote relation, though not an immediate one, to other events and actions beyond the compass of this world. All events have future *unknown* consequences; and, as far as we can trace any event, it is plain, that if it were not connected with other things in nature, both past and to come, it could not possibly have happened at all. Nor is there any one thing whose circumstances we can fully explain: those circumstances, I mean, which are so connected with it, that without them it could not have been. So ignorant are we, with all our improvements in science, that no man can answer all the questions that might be proposed about the growth of a blade of grass, or the motion of a finger. Every event, which we know, is accomplished by a connection of causes and relations, which are beyond the reach of our faculties; and things, which seem the most insignificant, are perpetually observed to be necessary conditions to other things of the greatest importance: so that, for aught we know, any one thing whatever may be a necessary condition to any other.

It is a matter of fact, then, that the natural government of the world, is a scheme far beyond our comprehension. Suppose, then, that there is a moral government of the world, is it not probable, that it also is a scheme beyond our comprehension? It is probable, that, as in nature events hang toge-

ther, and are connected in a most wonderful manner, so as to form one great plan, it is so also in the moral world, and that every part has a relation to the whole. For example, the length of time, and the degrees and ways in which virtue is under discipline, and wickedness is permitted; also the times and the instruments for the execution of justice; and the rewards of virtue and punishments of vice, may all be parts adapted to each other of one great moral system. And if so, then we are not competent to judge of the whole scheme; and since we can see and know but a very little of it, we cannot reasonably object to parts of it.

Now though we acknowledge our ignorance in common life, yet numbers forget it when they talk about religion, or at least do not make due allowance for it: let us then pursue this subject a little farther, and you will see, how justly our ignorance is an answer to objections against the scheme of Providence.

Suppose, then, a person should boldly assert, that the origin and continuance of evil might have been prevented by repeated interpositions so contrived, as to prevent mischief from them: or if this were impracticable; suppose he should assert, that a *scheme* of moral government was in itself an imperfection, and that things would have been better administered by single acts of distributive justice,

and goodness. Well, admit all this, for argument's sake, to be true, and what does it amount to? Why just to this, and no more;—that the government of the world might have been better;—but it does not shew that it is not good. But such assertions are entirely arbitrary; for no man can give a proof of them even to the *lowest* degree of probability. Our ignorance, then, is still a sufficient answer, to all such objections against the divine government. We know but very little of any part of it; and therefore are incompetent to judge of the whole. The very things objected to, may from some relation to others, which relation we cannot see; may, I say, be perfectly just and good. They may be like the scaffolding of a building, which, though at times unsightly, is absolutely necessary to the raising of the building itself.

But let me present you a few more observations upon some particular things in the natural government of the world by God, which may be supposed to be analogous to what is in his moral government. First, then, you know that, in the natural world, nothing is accomplished without means; and not only so, but those means are often very disagreeable, though they produce a much greater good, than their disagreeableness is an evil. In many cases, it is only experience which teaches us the ends which

certain means produce: nay, some means seem quite contrary to what they effect; for instance, frost and snow in a certain quantity, in this country, are favourable to agriculture, though nothing but experience could teach us it. Storms and hurricanes also in some countries, though destructive in their immediate effects, produce a general good result. Since, then, this is the case in the natural world, it may be so in the moral; and our liability to vice, and to misery from each other's means, may upon the whole be friendly to virtue, and ultimately produce an overbalance of happiness. Nor does it amount to any objection against the divine government, that we do not see the direct tendency of all means, or that sometimes they seem to have a contrary tendency; for sickness sometimes, as a fit of the gout or a fever, produces greater health, and may be, and often is, the means of saving a man's life.

But do not suppose I mean, that vice *in itself* is better than virtue, or misery than happiness; for such an opinion would be both absurd and wicked. Our capacity of vice and misery may, and does contribute to the perfection and happiness of the world; and the permission of evil may be beneficial to it: yet it might have been much better for the world, if this very evil had never existed. It certainly

would be better for a man to abstain from, than to commit wickedness; but it would be more mischievous *forcibly* to restrain than to permit it. A man may, and often does receive benefit from a fault, when it would be infinitely better if he had never committed it; as a fever sometimes saves a man's life:—though no sober man would say sickness was better than health.

But further, it is a fact, that the natural world is governed by *general* laws; and that, no doubt, for the best reasons: it is probable, then, that the moral government of the world is by general laws. In the natural world, all good ends are effected by general laws; as health by food and exercise; crops of corn, &c. by sun, rain, and labour; nor can we have any one enjoyment, but what we must get in some degree or other for ourselves. And hence it is, that we are under an absolute necessity of using foresight, which otherwise we would not use: nay it would not exist, if the world was not governed by general laws. You must see, then, that if every particular irregularity was prevented by an immediate interposition, the effects would *necessarily* be bad. For instance, if the effects of idleness, negligence, and debauchery, were prevented by immediate interpositions, it would make doubtful the natural rule of life; which rule we ascertain by this

very thing, that the world is governed by general laws. Indeed, for any thing we know, it may be impossible in the nature of things to prevent, by general regulations, particular irregularities; as we find is the case in civil government. And still more, perhaps those things which we call irregularities may not be so at all; because they may be the means of accomplishing wise and good ends more considerable: and, perhaps, interpositions to prevent particular irregularities, would produce greater evil than they would prevent; and prevent greater good than they would produce. And if so, then the not interposing is an instance of goodness; and not a ground of complaint against the order and course of nature, as established by the Deity.

But you may say, since you lay so much stress upon our ignorance, in answering objections to religion; may not our ignorance be made use of as an argument against the proof of religion? Now to this I answer, first, that though *total* ignorance destroys all proof of a matter, yet *partial* ignorance does not. For instance, we may be assured that a person's character is such, that he will pursue certain ends in his mode of acting; but we may not know the proper mode of acting to obtain those ends. Our ignorance, then, in such a case, is an answer to objections against his *mode* of acting;

but does not by any means invalidate the proof that *such ends* were pursued by him. Thus in religion; its proof shews us, that the character and government of God is moral; and that he will ultimately reward every one according to his works. But certainly we are not able to judge of the proper method of accomplishing this purpose; for we are finite, but he infinite in all respects. Our ignorance is, therefore, a full answer to objections against his method of procedure. An ignorant ploughman cannot conceive how all the parts of a cotton-mill or a clock conspire to produce the effect they do produce; infinitely less, then, can we perceive the propriety of all the parts and methods of the divine government.

But, secondly, suppose I admit, for the sake of argument, that the proof of religion is *doubtful*, in consequence of arguments drawn from our ignorance; yet this will not destroy moral obligations. For moral obligations would remain, though it were *not certain* what would be the consequences after death of neglecting them; since the mind, unless perverted, must feel those obligations; and self-interest, and the interest of society, makes them necessary in the absolute sense of the word. And though it were *doubtful* what would be the future consequences of virtue and vice, yet it is *probable*

that they may be what religion teaches us they will be: and hence, we are under a certain obligation to avoid vice and pursue virtue: for upon *probability*, in such a matter, we are bound to act as if upon certainty.

But, thirdly, you cannot apply arguments drawn from our ignorance to invalidate the proof of religion, as you can apply them to invalidate objections against religion. For let it be granted, that God exercises a moral government over the world; then the analogy of nature will shew us, that it must be a scheme beyond our comprehension. And if you look at many particulars in nature, their analogy will shew you, that many parts of the scheme of moral government may tend to produce ends, which at first sight they seem so far from accomplishing, as even to appear contradictory. Many things in nature produce a good, of which nothing but experience could convince us, or shew to us. So, in the moral government of the world, many things which appear contradictory, may ultimately produce good. If, then, we understood, the whole scheme of the divine government, it is more than probable, we should find, that the disorders which occur, and which are objected against, are not only consistent with justice and goodness, but even instances of them. But you cannot argue thus against the proof

of religion; you cannot shew that if we knew the whole of the case, it would then appear that religion is in itself unwise, bad, or unjust; and, therefore, these observations, drawn from our ignorance, serve in full force to answer objections against religion, but will not serve to invalidate its proof.

Lastly, Let me request you to remember that, though the answers which have now been given to the objections against religion, are drawn generally speaking from our ignorance; yet not merely so, but from facts, which the analogy of nature shews us respecting our ignorance. For analogy shews us *positively*, that we are *incompetent* judges in many things in nature; which are similar to the things in religion, about which we pretend to judge and object, as if we were *competent* judges. So that the things here insisted upon are not mere suppositions of unknown impossibilities and relations; but are suggested to our thoughts, and rendered credible, by the analogy of nature. And to argue thus, is to argue from facts and from what we know; but to argue contrary, is not judging by facts.

As, then, the scheme of the natural world, is to us incomprehensible, so also must be the scheme of the moral world; and, therefore, our ignorance, is a sufficient answer to objections against it. In your pursuit, then, after knowledge, remember there is a

being an incomprehensible Scheme. 79

limit to the human understanding, which it is useful to know ; as this knowledge will prevent you from mispending your time in useless exertions, and unprofitable attempts.

I am, yours, very sincerely,

J. W.

LETTER IX.

Conclusion.

Cheam, March, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

FROM the observations in my last letter to you, it appears that our ignorance of the scheme of the divine government, is a full answer to the objections, which some would make against its equity and goodness. But it appears further, that our present little busy scene of life, is connected with a much larger plan of things; for it is evident that we are placed in the middle of a system even in temporals, for every thing we do is connected with something present, past, and to come: and if so, in temporals, then is it most likely that it is the same in religion. We find also, as a matter of fact, that we cannot comprehend the scheme of the natural world: surely, then, we can less comprehend the scheme of the moral. Permit me, then, to offer you a brief recapitulation of what has been stated in these letters; by way of

concluding the subject of analogy between the constitution and course of nature and what is called natural religion.

First, then, it is very probable we shall live after death; for in this life we subsist in very different manners;—as in the womb before we were born;—as in infancy and manhood; and as having gone through entire changes of body, and yet are still the same persons. You are not *certain* that death will destroy your powers of perception; and as you have them now, the probability is that you will continue to possess them; as you find you do in sleep, though unconscious of their exercise. And as for your powers of reflection, you know, that you often exercise them, after you have gotten ideas, without the help of the body at all: it is probable, then, that the destruction of the body will not be the destruction of your powers of perception or reflection.

But it is not only probable that we shall live after death, but live in a state of rewards or punishments according to our conduct in this life: for a man's happiness or misery in this life depends much upon himself; and, in a general way, is the result of his own individual conduct. Vicious practices necessarily produce misery here; and virtue good. Prudence and good management in youth are for the advantage of old age: in like manner virtue may be

for our profit in another world. Vice and folly in early life are followed by bad consequences here : in like manner bad consequences may follow the wicked beyond the grave. Unless the husbandman sows, he cannot have a crop ; so it is probable, unless we pursue virtue, we cannot be happy after death. In the natural government of the world, it is a matter of fact, that men are punished for bad actions, and rewarded for good. And we are so constituted, that we cannot think that any other rule would be just : and though this present world does not exhibit the perfection of moral government ; yet we see such traces and beginnings of a moral government, as to make it credible, that it will be carried forward to perfection in a future stage of our existence.

Our temporal interest is evidently put much in our own power, and is exposed to danger, both on account of our own mismanagement, and the influence of others upon us : it is probable, then, that it may be the same in matters of religion. But as our dangers in temporals call for the continual exercise of diligence and temperance : in other words, for a *character*, which may tend to ensure success : so also this world may be a state of discipline, in which our business should be to acquire and exercise a character or disposition, by which we may be

meet for the enjoyment of future happiness. Infancy is evidently a state of discipline for youth ; and youth for manhood and old age ; this world, then, may be a state of discipline for another. And whatever objections, drawn from the doctrines of necessity, men may make against religion, yet it is plain, that if the present course of things can be reconciled with the doctrines of necessity, so also can religion : and hence it follows, that admitting the doctrine of necessity, still we are accountable for our conduct and behaviour. And as we know so very little of the natural scheme of the world, nor can fully explain any one single event, we certainly ought not to think ourselves competent to judge of the whole plan of the moral government of the world ; and therefore ought not to make objections against it.

Now the analogy here pursued is from matters of fact. And surely after all this, it is a very possible thing—it is very probable, that religion may be true. But let it be admitted that religion is a thing not true ; yet a vicious man could gain but very little by vice in this world, for society could not subsist without restraining and punishing it. But if religion may be true, as it certainly may, what folly, what madness, can be so great, as to act contrary to its dictates ? We account it folly in a man,

to risk his whole temporal fortune upon a cast of the dice; but infinitely greater is his folly, who risks his future happiness for the temporary pleasure or gain of wickedness. The very *probability*, nay the very *possibility* of religion being true, is fully a sufficient reason for attending to its injunctions. Men are obliged, independent of religious considerations, to put a restraint upon themselves in their intercourse with each other, and in the prosecution of their temporal affairs; why then should we not practise self-denial, from religious motives, and for religious purposes? God has evidently given us a moral capacity; we feel the presages of conscience from his appointment; we have a natural apprehension of him as a righteous governor and judge;—all of which things are proper proofs of religion.

Let it, then, be admitted, that there is a God, the natural governor of the world, and analogy shews that religion may be true; and if so, we are under an absolute obligation upon every principle from which we act in life, diligently to pursue and practise it.

I have now finished my letters to you upon the subject of analogy, as applied to natural religion; and I hope soon to send you another series upon revealed, according to the arrangement of the very eminent author, whom I wish to render more

easy to you. If I have facilitated your studies upon this subject, I shall feel much gratified. And hoping that no application will be wanting on your part, as I am sure talents are not:

I am, yours, very sincerely,

J. W.



PART II.

LETTER I.

On the Importance of Christianity.

Cheam, April, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

IN my last letter to you, I closed the subject of analogy, as applied to what is called natural religion; let us now proceed to apply it to revealed; and as an introduction to the subject, point out the importance of christianity.

Now, had the light of reason been perfectly sufficient in matters of religion, so as to render a divine revelation *useless*, certainly no revelation would ever have been given. But surely, you cannot for a moment imagine, that a revelation was *useless*, when you reflect upon the religious state of the heathen world *before* the times of christianity;

or turn your attention to those nations which have borrowed no light from it. You have no sufficient ground to suppose, that any one person could have reasoned out what is called natural religion, in its genuine simplicity, and clear of superstition: and it is almost certain, that the bulk of mankind could not have done it. But supposing some individuals could have reasoned out natural religion; yet still they would have needed, in a very high degree, some standing admonition to inform them of it, and to inculcate it upon them. And supposing their attachment to religion to be very great; yet still there would be many occasions, in which supernatural instruction and assistance might be afforded to them, as being singularly useful. To say, then, that revelation is *useless*, is not less absurd, than to say, we are so well situated in all respects in our present condition that we cannot be better.

But there are some men, who, though they do not speak of revelation as being useless, yet overlook it as a matter of small moment, provided that natural religion be observed. They admit, perhaps, that the belief and practice of natural piety and virtue were promoted by the first publication of christianity; but at the same time, think it a matter of no moment, upon what motives this belief and

practice are founded. Let us then, first, point out the importance of christianity in answer to such as these; and this will lead us, secondly, to shew the extravagance of the opinion that revelation is useless.

Now, in general, you must admit, that if God has given a revelation, it certainly cannot be an indifferent matter whether we obey or disobey its commands. If a revelation is given, there are no doubt sufficient reasons for it; though we cannot see them: for the whole analogy of nature shews, that there may be infinite reasons for things, of which reasons we are ignorant. But you must consider christianity under a double aspect; first, as a republication and external institution of natural or essential religion adapted to the state of man, in order to produce piety and virtue: and, secondly, as a dispensation not discoverable by reason, which enjoins several distinct precepts peculiar to itself; for natural religion is by no means the whole of Christianity. Considering it in this double point of view, I doubt not, its importance will appear to you obvious.

Now, first, you know, that christianity is a republication of natural religion in its genuine simplicity, and free from all superstition. It instructs mankind most clearly in the great doctrines of the moral system of the world;—that the world is the

work of an infinitely perfect being, and under his government;—that virtue is his law;—and that finally he will render to every man according to his works. But christianity is not only a republication of natural religion, but an *authoritative* republication of it; for the gospel not only teaches the great truths of natural religion, but enjoins them as from the Deity. Hence then, the miracles and prophecies recorded in the Scriptures, not only prove a *particular* act of Providence in the redemption of the world by the Messiah, but also prove God's *general* providence over the world, as our moral governor and judge; for these miracles and prophecies, and, indeed, the whole of christianity, *necessarily* imply, that God is a moral governor and judge. Those also who wrought the miracles, and delivered the prophecies, always taught and insisted that this was the character of the Deity. So that, in fact, natural religion, is as much proved by revelation, as it would have been, if revelation had been intended to prove nothing else.

But, perhaps, in speculation you may object to miracles, as a proof of natural religion. But however you may object in speculation, in practice no such objections will hold good: for suppose a man was to teach natural religion to a nation totally ignorant of it, and that he could predict events with certainty; could divide the sea with a word; could

feed multitudes with bread from heaven ; could heal all manner of diseases ; and raise the dead, even himself to life ; would not all this give fresh weight and additional credibility to what he taught ? There can be no doubt, that it would give increased weight to his doctrines ; that it would give the greatest practical proof, which, perhaps, man can receive, of their credibility and truth. The law of Moses, then, and the gospel of Christ, are authoritative publications of the law of nature ; and they are a proof of God's general providence over the world as a moral governor ; as well as of a particular providence, in its redemption by the Messiah.

But, further, suppose now a man of the greatest and most improved mind, who had *never heard of revelation*, convinced that the world, though in great disorder, was under the moral government of an infinitely perfect being ; but yet suspicious, that the subject was above his faculties ; and suppose, further, that in consequence of this suspicion, of the subject being above his faculties, that he was in danger of being led away by the bad example of all those around him, who had no practical sense of religion. How would such a person be confirmed in his good sentiments, when all at once he should find this moral government, or system of the world, actually revealed by that infinitely perfect being, in

whom, from principles of reason, he had believed ; and also should find, that those persons, whom God employed to reveal it, were enabled to suspend and change the laws of nature. So that however advantageously a man may be situated with regard to natural religion, independent of revelation ; yet revelation will give weight and evidence to his good sentiments.

But if you further consider christianity, you will find it not only enforcing natural religion at its first publication, but continuing to do so, by a visible society or church ; which is distinguished from the rest of the world by peculiar religious institutions, and an appointed method of instruction, and external religion and worship. By the institution of a church, and its forms of service and worship, what we call natural religion is continued down to mankind, and inculcated upon them with additional weight and influence. This church serves as a method of education, by which men are constantly taught the great truths of the being of a God, and of a future state of rewards and punishments ; and by which they are trained to piety and virtue, so as to be meet for a higher and better state. Now all these advantages arise from a visible church with positive institutions : and hence you must see the good of positive institutions ; since you cannot have an idea of a visible church without them. Since, then,

christianity affords such evident support to natural religion, it is strange that some men should be so slow in perceiving this: for certainly no man will pretend to say, that the state of the heathen world was equally advantageous to natural religion, as is the state of the christian world.

Nor can you object against christianity, unless you will be a downright atheist, that it has been perverted, or that its effects^o have been small; for the same things will hold good, to a much greater degree against reason, as supported by the principles of theism. Nor can it be said truly, that the effects of christianity have been small; for it is a matter of fact, that mankind are much improved by it. Nor can you argue against christianity from its perversion: for you may as well argue against food, because some men pervert it by gluttony; or against reason, because some abuse it. You must argue respecting things from their genuine tendency; and most certainly the gospel would produce the best and happiest effects, if men did their part; that part which is left them to do, and which they can do.

Both revelation and reason teach men what to do, and avoid; but do not *force* them to act accordingly: both teach us how to act, but leave us at liberty to act as we please, till the appointed time

of judgement; and every moment's experience shews us, that God has so constituted the state of man. To object, then, against christianity, either on account of its perversion, or the smallness of its effects, is in effect to object against theism itself, and to go into downright atheism.

Christianity, then, is very important; since it is not only a promulgation of natural religion, but an *authoritative* promulgation of it: since, also, it contains new lights and circumstances adapted to the wants and necessities of man. Its nature is also such, that every individual member of the church, is bound to promote its influence in some way or another: some by teaching it professedly; and all by their lives and conduct. If, then, you neglect the gospel, merely in this view of it, you neglect to support even natural religion; and you expose men to entire scepticism and infidelity.

But, secondly, christianity is a great deal more than the promulgation of natural religion;—for it reveals a dispensation of providence to man as a ruined creature;—and hence, that he owes distinct duties to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, on account of their office, and work in his redemption. Now, according to this revelation, we are commanded to be baptized in the name of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, as well as of the Father;

and other duties also towards the Son, and the Holy Ghost are enjoined upon us. Now though reason may inform us what are our relations to the father, and hence our duty to him; yet it is scripture only which reveals our relations to the Son and Spirit, and hence our duty to them. For if you admit, from scripture, that the Son is your redeemer, and the Spirit your sanctifier, as you admit, from reason, that God is the moral governor of the world; then it is no more a question, why you should be baptized in the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, than in the name of the Father. Religion is external and internal; and the essence of internal natural religion may be said to consist in religious regards to God the Father Almighty; and the essence of revealed, as distinguished from natural, in religious regards to the Son and Spirit. Now as the Son and Spirit have each their proper office, and are related to us in the work of our redemption; are we not bound to pay them internal religious regards, as we are bound to have good-will to our relations and fellow men, in consequence of their relations to us? But what are those religious regards, say you, which we owe to the Son and Spirit? Why; honour, reverence, love, trust, gratitude, fear, and hope. As to the manner in which these divine persons should be *externally* wor-

shipped, it is a matter of pure revelation : but the *internal* regard or worship, which we owe to them, is as much a real obligation of reason, in consequence of their relations to us, if you admit those relations to exist, as it is an obligation of reason to fear and love the Father.

Our duties, then, towards the Son and Holy Ghost, are strictly moral duties; since they arise out of their relations to us, and are, therefore, antecedent to external command. We are bound to observe those duties to them, as much as to observe charity to mankind, in consequence of our relation to them : and to neglect those duties may, under God's government, be attended with the same kind of consequences, as to neglect or violate our duties to him, or to one another: If Christ be our mediator, who can tell what may result, even naturally, from our neglect of him? For as misery is the natural consequence of vice, i. e. of violating the relations in which we stand to God, our neighbour, or ourselves; so neglecting Christ, or violating the relations in which we stand to him, may result in the most fatal consequences to us. And, in like manner, to neglect the Holy Ghost, may be followed, even in the natural course of things, by unspeakable evils. If then, christianity be true, or even credible; to treat it with indifference can

be no light matter. Nor is there any obligation more binding upon us, than that of examining its evidence, supposing it credible; and of embracing it, supposing it true.

Before I conclude this letter I would call your attention to the two following deductions, as illustrating what has been already observed.

And, first, you may deduce from what has been said, the distinction between what is positive, and what is moral in religion. Positive precepts are those, whose reasons we do not see; moral precepts are those, whose reasons we do see. Positive duties depend on external command; moral duties arise out of the nature of the case, and are antecedent to external command. But observe, it is not the *manner*, in which any relation in which we stand, is made known to us, that denominates any duty either positive or moral: for it is as much a positive duty to be baptized in the name of the Father as of the Son, because both arise equally from a revealed command;—though our relation to the Father is known by reason; to the Son it is known by revelation only. And further, admit the Gospel to be true,—and you are equally bound to be grateful to the Son for his voluntary work in your redemption, as to the Father for being the fountain of all goodness; though your gratitude

to the Son is imposed by revelation only, but your gratitude to the Father by reason.

But, secondly, as there is a distinction between what is positive and what is moral in religion; so this appears the reason, why the scriptures teach us to prefer what is moral to what is positive, when *both cannot be observed at the same time*. But in comparing positive institutions with what is moral in religion, you must remember, that the former have a moral nature; since the reasons of them appear in general, and they produce a moral effect. In comparing, therefore, what is positive and what is moral, you must take care to compare them no farther, than as they are different. The *external* worship of God, for instance, is a moral duty, though no particular mode of that worship is; you must be careful then not to confound things that are different, nor to sever those which are alike. Keeping these distinctions then in view, it is evident that both the reason of things, and the scriptures, teach us to prefer a moral duty to a positive institution, when they so interfere as that both cannot be observed at the same time. Men are too apt to place religion in external forms, and to neglect real piety and virtue; and to counteract this is one great design of revelation: hence Christ (Matt. ix. 13.) taught the Jews, that God

would have mercy and not sacrifice ; i. e. preferred moral duties to the observance of positive institutions.

But do not think, that any positive institution appointed by God may be neglected ; for any command from him lays us under a moral obligation to observe it. When, therefore, it is said, that moral duties are to be preferred to positive institutions, you must not suppose that positive institutions may be neglected.

From the whole, then, I think it must be plain to you, that christianity is of great importance ; whether we consider it merely as a publication of natural religion delivered with authority ; and as containing new lights and circumstances adapted to the state of man ; and by a visible church, supporting and extending the doctrine of one God, and of a future state of rewards and punishments : or whether we consider it as a system of Providence beyond the discovery of reason ; by which new obligations to moral duty, and also new moral duties are imposed on us.

I am, yours, very sincerely,

J. W.

LETTER II.

*On the supposed Presumption against a Revelation
considered as Miraculous.*

Cheam, May, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING in my last letter pointed out to you the importance of Christianity, upon supposition of its truth; I shall in this shew you, that there is no presumption against a revelation in general: and in some following letters, I shall consider the objections against the christian revelation in particular, and also the evidence in support of it, and the objections against that evidence.

It seems to be supposed by many, that there is a peculiar presumption, arising from the analogy of nature, against the scheme of christianity; or at least against miracles. And hence they suppose, that stronger evidence is necessary to prove the truth of christianity, or at least of miracles, than any other matter of fact. Let us then consider this supposition; and though its consideration

may be thought of no great moment, yet it may tend to open your mind, and remove some prejudices.

Now the general scheme of christianity is, that God created and invisibly governs the world by Jesus Christ; that by him he will hereafter judge it in righteousness; and that good men are under the secret influence of his spirit. Nor can I find any presumption against this general scheme from the analogy of nature; for if there be any such presumption, it must be either because this scheme is not discoverable by reason or experience; or else, because it is unlike that course of nature which now is. But we shall see that analogy affords no presumption against it upon either of these accounts.

And, first, there is no presumption against the scheme of christianity, because of its not being discoverable by reason or experience. For let us suppose a person, who knows nothing of revelation, but yet is of a most improved mind, and acquainted with our whole scheme of natural philosophy and natural religion: such a person must be sensible, that he knows very little of the natural and moral scheme of the *whole* universe. He must be sensible, that there are innumerable things respecting the past, the present, and the future dispensations of Providence, which he cannot know, except by

revelation. That part which we see of the *whole* plan of Providence over the *whole universe*, is but as a point; nay is but a point compared with the whole plan of Providence over this world. Without revelation it is a mere nothing that we can discover of the infinite plan of the divine government over the universe, or even over our own little world. Hence, then, it is plain, that there is no presumption from analogy against the truth of things, merely because they are beyond the reach of our natural faculties. Nor, secondly, is there any presumption from analogy against the general plan of christianity, because of its being *unlike* the present known course of nature: for certainly the analogy of this world cannot afford a presumption against what may be a part of the infinite plan of the divine government. You have no right to suppose, that the *whole* of the scheme of Providence over the *whole universe*, and *every part* of that scheme, is like to the very little you can see in this world. Even in the present course of nature, you see many things that are unlike, and for which you cannot account; you ought not then to wonder at an unlikeness between things visible and invisible. But however, that all objection may be removed on this ground, we shall see, in some of the following letters, that there is an actual likeness between the scheme of christianity, and the scheme of nature.

But, further, there is no presumption from ana-

logy against even miracles; and particularly none against a revelation being made at the beginning of the world. For you have no idea of a miracle, but by referring it to a known course of nature: but at the beginning of the world there was no course of nature, or at least you do not know what it was;—which on this question to you is the same;—and, therefore, you must consider the question of a revelation given at the beginning of the world, as a common question of fact. You cannot consider a revelation, when referred to the beginning of the world, as a miracle, but as a common matter of fact; and therefore that evidence of tradition or history, which proves any common fact of equal antiquity, for instance, what part of the world was first inhabited, that evidence, I say, is equally valid to prove a revelation when referred to the beginning of the world. The beginning of the world affords you no known course of nature to which you can compare, as a miracle, a revelation made at that time; you must then consider a revelation made at that time, as a common question of fact.

The power, indeed, which placed man at first in the world, cannot properly be called *miraculous*, according to our notion of a miracle; but yet it must have been a power, at least in its operations, very different from any which we see exerted in the present course of nature. Whether then this

power stopped immediately after man's formation, or proceeded to give him a revelation; is a question of the same kind, as whether any ordinary power, after having produced one effect, proceeded to produce another effect. Or if you choose to call that power miraculous, which was exerted in the formation of the world, yet this will not alter the case: for if you admit that a miraculous power was exerted at the formation of the world, there can be no presumption against that miraculous power exerting itself further, in giving a revelation to man. If you admit a miraculous power in one case, you certainly cannot say it is impossible, nay nor improbable, in the other. From all this, then, it is evident, that the analogy of nature affords no presumption against a revelation being given to man when he was first placed upon the earth.

But in addition to these observations, you must remember, that all history and tradition goes to shew that religion first came by revelation. There is no historical evidence whatever to prove that religion was first discovered by reason; but there is a great deal of historical evidence, setting the scriptures out of the question, to prove that religion first came by revelation. And if it was given by revelation at the beginning of the world, then what

should prevent another revelation from being given afterwards? If the former revelation *be* true, the latter certainly *may* be true.

But, perhaps, you may still object and say, that after the establishment and during a regulated course of nature, there is a presumption from analogy against miracles, and particularly against a revelation.

Now before you have any right to make such an objection, you ought to be acquainted with a case parallel to that of this world; so as to be able to compare the two, and reason from analogy: and therefore, till you can produce such a case, you cannot argue from analogy against revelation in general. But supposing you had such a case, yet a presumptive proof drawn from *one* instance, either for or against revelation, would be infinitely precarious. Granted that your instance had or had not a revelation; yet it would be very uncertain from this *one* case to infer, that our world must either have or have not a revelation.

But to be more particular. Now, first, if you take any speculative opinion, or matter of fact whatever, and lay aside every idea of its proof, the presumption is a million to one against its truth; and yet almost any proof will remove the presumption against its truth. Independent of proof, the

presumption is a million to one against the story of Cæsar, Pompey, or any other man. Nay let a number of common facts come into your mind, and be arranged by you as a history; yet, without proof, no one would think them true: nor indeed can any one single common fact be considered as true, independent of proof. Supposing then that there is a presumption against miracles; yet it is only what exists in reality against the most common facts: hence, then, the question is not so much, whether there be any presumption against miracles, but what *degree* of presumption there is against them, and whether that degree of presumption is so great as to render them incredible in general. But, secondly, let religion be put out of consideration; and yet, even then, on account of your ignorance of the causes, and of all the circumstances on which the present course of nature depends, you have no right to suppose, that the space of five or six thousand years may not have afforded reasons for the miraculous interposition of the Deity towards man. The presumption then for miracles, *in general*, is beyond all comparison greater than for any *particular* common fact, supposing neither proved by any evidence. But, thirdly, if you take religion and the moral state of man into consideration, then you see positive rea-

sons for miracles; viz. that men might receive information, which their own powers could not reach, and might have that information confirmed to them. And as you see there are positive reasons for miracles, by taking religion and the moral state of man into consideration; this gives a presumption that it might be part of the infinite plan of Providence that miracles should be afforded to man. But, lastly, miracles ought not to be compared with common natural events, but with the extraordinary appearances of nature; as for instance, the appearances of comets, and of the powers of magnetism, and electricity: and then the comparison will be between the presumption against miracles, and the presumption against such extraordinary appearances. Now to a man, who had never seen any such extraordinary appearances, at the first hearing of them, there would be great objections against them: but still they would be not only credible but true; and so also may miracles be both credible and true.

To sum up this letter then in few words; I think it is plain, that there is no presumption against miracles in the abstract, so as to render them incredible. And since we can discover positive reasons for them, this gives a positive credibility to their history, in cases in which those rea-

sons hold good. And as miracles ought to be compared with the extraordinary appearances of nature, it is also plain, that there is no more presumption from analogy against miracles, than against those extraordinary appearances.

I am yours very sincerely,

J. W.

LETTER III.

*On the Credibility that a Revelation would
appear liable to Objections.*

Cheam, May, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

GREAT and many are the objections which are made against christianity. Some object, not only against its evidence, but against itself, independent of its evidence; they object against its whole scheme, and the *manner* in which it is left to the world. Some object against certain historical facts which are recorded in scripture;—and they pretend also that revelation is deficient; and that many things in it have given occasion to enthusiasm and superstition, and to tyranny and wickedness. They object also to revelation because it is not universal; and because its evidence is not so convincing as they think it might have been. Others think it a strong objection against the scriptures because they are not composed according to what are called rules of

criticism; and they treat them with inexpressible scorn, because of the hieroglyphical and figurative language in which some parts are written. Now, in some of my following letters, I shall attend to the principal of these objections; but in this, if you admit me that a revelation is possible, I shall shew you, that it is highly credible we must be incompetent judges of revelation in itself; and that it must contain many things which will appear liable to objection, unless we judge of it by the analogy of nature. And from hence it will follow, that objections against christianity itself are chiefly frivolous; though, at the same time, I admit, that particular objections against its evidence are to be seriously considered and attended to.

But do not suppose I mean to disparage reason; for it is only by reason that we can judge even of the truth of revelation itself: nor by any means imagine I assert, that a supposed revelation cannot be proved false; since any system which contains clear immoralities or contradictions must be false. But still, objections against christianity itself, and objections against its *evidence* are very different things; and I feel no hesitation in saying, that the former are quite frivolous.

Now you must not forget, that I all along take it for granted, that there is a God, the natural governor of the world. Keeping this then in mind,

you well know, that as he governs the natural world by a scheme of general laws, which are known to us by reason and experience, so the scriptures inform us of an *additional* scheme, which he has made known to us by revelation: a scheme, by which he has informed men of things, which they themselves could not have discovered; and reminded them of other things, which perhaps they might have known without an immediate revelation, but which they were too apt to neglect. And in attestation of this scheme, the scriptures also inform us, that God caused several miracles to be performed. Now if God be the author of both these schemes, and if they form one, or at least are parts of one great plan of Providence, then it is very probable, that if we are incompetent judges of the scheme of the natural world, we are also incompetent judges of the scheme of revelation. But the fact is, that we are incompetent judges of the scheme of the natural world; we cannot trace *all* the causes and connexions of any one single fact whatever; much less then are we competent to judge of the whole scheme of the natural world; it is certainly, then, more than probable, that we are incompetent to judge of the whole scheme of revelation. Experience also teaches us, that the constitution and course of nature are very different from what men,

before experience, might have expected; and some fancy that great objections lie against the course of nature: hence then it is probable, that revelation would be different from what men before experience, might have expected; and that apparent objections would lie against its scheme, and against the degree and manner of the miracles wrought in proof of it.

To illustrate these observations, suppose that a prince should govern his dominions in the best and wisest manner according to general laws; but that on proper emergencies he should suspend those general laws, and govern in a different manner. Now if one of his subjects was incompetent to judge beforehand, or independent of experience, by what general laws the government was or should be carried on, much more would he be incompetent to judge in what manner it should be conducted on particular emergencies. If this subject was not an adequate judge of the ordinary administration, he certainly could not be a judge of the extraordinary: if there appeared objections against the former, there certainly would against the latter. In like manner, as you are incompetent to judge of the whole course and constitution of nature, and may, independent of experience, suppose that objections lie against it; so also, independent of experience, it

is evidently credible that objections may appear to lie against revelation.

Now let us apply these general observations to a particular case ; for instance, to the case of inspiration. Now you do not know beforehand, or *a priori*, in what manner, or by what means, God would give man *natural* knowledge and instruction : suppose, then, a revelation given to man, you cannot tell beforehand, in what manner, or by what means, that revelation or supernatural light and instruction would be given. You are not competent to judge what quantity of *natural* knowledge God would give to any particular man by the use of his own reason and experience ; you cannot then be competent to judge what quantity of divine inspiration he would be pleased to give on matters of revelation. Nay, you do not know beforehand, whether reason itself would be given to man all at once or gradually ; and therefore you ought not to think yourself competent to decide in what manner, in what degree, and in what circumstances, a revelation would, or even should be given. You do not know whether its evidence would be certain, probable, or doubtful ; or whether it would be revealed all at once or gradually : nay, I go further and say, that you are not competent to judge, whether it would be committed to writing, or left to

verbal tradition, and hence be very liable to be corrupted, and at last to be lost.

But a revelation not committed to writing, and so liable to be lost, would not, say you, have answered its purposes. But I ask, what purposes do you mean? It would not, indeed, have answered the purposes which christianity has effected; but it would have answered other purposes, or the same in a different degree; and which were best adapted to God's general government, you could not have determined beforehand.

Since, then, we are not competent to judge beforehand, how, or in what manner and degree a revelation would, or even should be given; it is quite frivolous to object to a particular revelation, because it is given to us in one way rather than another. The only question, then, respecting christianity, is this, is it a real revelation; and not, is it given as we might have expected: and the only question respecting the scriptures is this, are they what they claim to be; and not what weak men might fancy they should be? All objections, then, against the scriptures on account of obscurity, or seeming inaccuracies of style, or on account of various readings, or of disputes about the authors of particular parts of them, can never overthrow their authority; unless it could be proved, which

it never can, that the prophets, our Lord, or his apostles, promised that they should be secure from these things. Indeed no objections can ever overthrow the christian revelation, but such as can prove, which they never can, that no miracles were wrought in proof of it; that there was nothing miraculous in its propagation; and that there are no prophecies connected with it. If, indeed, it could be proved, that there were none of these things, then would christianity be overthrown: but if the proofs, for the truth of any one of them, were much lower than they really are, yet even then we should be bound to regard christianity, and to be influenced by it in our life and conduct: for any probability of its truth would lay us under the most serious obligation to observe it. And, as it respects the scriptures, you cannot justly argue against them, especially their prophetic parts, as you may against common books; because you are not able to determine beforehand, in what manner, or how clearly the sense should have been expressed. Of common books you may be a judge, but of the scriptures you are not; and therefore the question respecting them is, what is their sense? and not, whether that sense might have been more accurately expressed.

But still you may object and say, that the *external probable* proof of a thing must be weakened by

internal improbabilities existing in that thing. But this objection will not apply against christianity; because you have already seen that, independent of testimony, there is a presumption of a million to one against the most common facts, which yet are proved by the most ordinary testimony: the positive testimony, then, that there is for christianity, will always so overcome any supposed internal improbability, as to make it appear more than probably true. And to this may be added, that you scarcely know what are internal improbabilities in revelation, if we except immoralities and plain contradictions, which never can be shewn to exist in christianity.

But to pursue this further. It certainly is evident, that we are incompetent to judge beforehand, in what degree, or in what manner a revelation would, or even should be given; the objections then of incompetent judges against itself must be frivolous. But if men will judge of revelation by *preconceived expectations*, then the analogy of nature shews us, that it is probable men will fancy they have strong objections against it, though really unexceptionable. For if men were to judge, by *preconceived expectations*, of the whole manner by which we gain instruction in the ordinary course of nature, they would think they had objections against that manner. For instance, men would think that

they ought to know the nature and cure of all diseases better than the motion and distances of the planets, or of astronomy in general: since the subject of medicine seems much more important to us than that of astronomy: but it is well known, that our knowledge of astronomy is much more accurate than our knowledge of the nature and cure of diseases. How uncertain also at best is language, by which we convey our thoughts to one another; though men might imagine that it should not be capable of deceiving us: and, in many cases, beasts are much more sagacious and prudent than man. If then these natural things appear, from *preconceived notions*, to be liable to objection, it is but reasonable to suppose, that if God did give a revelation, it also would appear liable to objection, and would be different in its design and manner from what men might expect.

Now let us apply these general observations to a particular objection against christianity; for instance, to the objection against the gift of tongues, viz. that it could not be miraculous, or from God, because it was sometimes abused: and you will see that these general observations are applicable to all other objections of a like kind. Now, if some of the first christians had the gift of tongues by a miracle, it is to be supposed, that they had the same

controul over that gift, as if they had learned the languages by ordinary study; and, therefore, might abuse it if they would. But to this you object, and say, that if God gave the gift at all, it should, nay, perhaps you will say, would have been given so as not to be liable to abuse: i. e. if you examine your objection, that God should, or would have miraculously interposed in a manner different from what he did. But according to what has been already advanced, you are not competent to judge in what manner he either should or would interpose, and therefore your objection is altogether invalid. Do but consider the natural gifts of memory, eloquence, and reason, and let me ask, are they always rightly applied? Are they never abused? If then *natural* gifts may be abused, as they certainly may, and often are; then analogy shews us, that it is very probable *spiritual* or *miraculous* gifts may also be abused.

There is also a great similarity between the light of nature and the light of revelation in several other respects; there is an analogy between the knowledge we obtain from nature and from revelation. For instance, the faith and conduct which form a christian, is a plain thing; as also are the rules of common life: but to obtain an extensive and accurate knowledge of the doctrines and prophecies of

the scriptures, requires much learning, study, and care; as it does to become well skilled in what may be called the natural sciences. The knowledge also of the *whole scheme*, of *all the doctrines* contained in the scriptures, unless given by a miracle, must be obtained, like natural knowledge, by the progress of learning and liberty; and by patient investigation during many years. The progress of natural philosophy also appears to have been but slow, when you reflect, that in all ages there were the same phenomena and powers in nature, and the same natural faculties in man to investigate them: it is not then unlikely that there may be many truths in the Bible, though it has been so long in men's hands, which may require much time for discovery, and may yet be unknown. Electricity and galvanism seem quite modern discoveries; yet they always must have existed in nature: so also, there may be many things in the Bible which are not yet discovered. God also might intend, that events, as they arose, should determine the meaning of many parts of scripture; as we find many truths in natural philosophy are discovered by particular events and circumstances, when men are neither trying nor expecting to discover such truths. There is evidently then an analogy between the manner in which truths in natural philosophy and in revelation are discovered; and since

God does not dispense his natural gifts, according to our notion of their advantage and consequence to us; it follows, that the same thing will probably take place in revelation.

But it may be said, since the scriptures represent the world as in a state of ruin, and christianity as the means of its recovery, is it likely that so many ages would elapse before it was given to the world, if it was a revelation from God? Or is it likely, that its effects would be so small, or its obscurities so great? Without determining whether the effects of christianity have, or have not been small, or its obscurities great; I answer, it is by no means unlikely that it would be so, if the scheme of christianity and the scheme of nature came from the same hand, which I take for granted. For are not all men liable to natural diseases, for which God has provided natural remedies? But yet the best remedies have been unknown for ages; and when discovered, then known only by a few. It is probable many remedies are yet unknown. Great difficulties also often attend the application of the best medicines; so that sometimes they cannot be used at all, because of certain circumstances in the case of the patient. The greatest discoveries in medicine have often been most violently opposed; and in many particular cases have been rejected, when they would have wrought

a cure. Then they will not always adopt a proper regimen to give remedies their efficacy; and when even proper remedies are applied, they are not always attended with success. Many people also, who are ill of diseases, for which there are certain and sure remedies, are never so happy as to meet with them; or even to know where to find them. In one word, the remedies, which God has provided in the natural world for natural diseases, are neither *certain, perfect, nor universal*: and since this is the case with respect to natural diseases and remedies, it is probable that it may and will be the same with respect to spiritual diseases and remedies; i. e. with respect to christianity in its application to the state and condition of man. I say in its *application*; for in its own nature it is *certain, perfect, and universal*.

What, then, are we in no sort judges of revelation? yes, certainly, in some sort we are. For we must judge, not only of its meaning, but also of its morality and evidence. It is our reason only that can judge of the morality of a revelation; but observe, we must not judge whether it contains things different from what we might beforehand expect from God; for to this we are incompetent: but reason can and must judge, whether a revelation contains any thing that is plainly contradictory to the wisdom, justice, and goodness of the Deity.

Now nothing of this kind can be proved against the Scriptures, but what would also prove that the constitution of nature is contrary to God's wisdom, justice, and goodness, which it certainly is not. There are, indeed, in Scripture, certain particular precepts, for performing a certain fact, which would be immoral, had they not been given by God to individuals for a particular purpose.

For instance, no man possesses life or property but by the grant and permission of God; if then he commands the life or property of an individual to be taken away by another, which in some cases the Scriptures say he did, then the precept justifies the act, and renders that right which otherwise would be wrong. If, indeed, the Scriptures, commanded us to be treacherous; ungrateful, or cruel, then they would be immoral, and could not come from God: but a particular precept from him, to take away the life or property of an individual, is not contrary to immutable morality; and, therefore, cannot be advanced as a valid objection against the Scriptures. Indeed there is no difficulty in these particular precepts, excepting that they may afford an occasion to enthusiastic and wicked men, of serving the most horrid purposes. But objections on this ground are not merely objections against the Scriptures or revelation, but against the *whole notion*, even of natural religion as a trial of our virtue,

and against the whole constitution of nature : but these objections you must recollect have been answered in a former letter, and amount to nothing, unless you will be an atheist. Reason must, however, be a judge of the evidence, for the truth of revelation, and of the objections against that evidence ; but having once found a revelation to be true, it must yield implicit deference to it :

In fine, the result of what I have said to you in this letter is, that the truth of christianity is scarcely at all affected by objections against its scheme, since there are no objections against its morality ; but that its truth would be affected by objections against its evidence, if such objections would hold good : or in other words, the great question is, *what proof is there of the truth of christianity, after due allowance being made for the objections against that proof?* For it is manifest, that objections against the scheme of christianity are frivolous. Those objections certainly can have no weight against christianity, which experience proves are inconclusive when applied to the constitution of nature. That constitution is not what men might have expected beforehand ; it is evidently, then, probable, that the constitution of revelation would not be what men might beforehand expect. To object against christianity, because it is not what men might expect beforehand, is to

take for granted that God acts as we see he does *not* act; and that he does not act, as we see he *does* act. But the unreasonableness of these objections will still more clearly appear, when we come to consider some particular analogies in nature, which will apply to and answer them.

Yours, very sincerely,

J. W.

LETTER IV.

*On Christianity being a System which we cannot
perfectly comprehend.*

Cheam, June, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

SINCE, according to my last letter, the analogy of nature shews, that a revelation from God to man must and will appear different from what we might expect, independent of experience, and be liable to apparent objections; it follows that such objections must lose their force. But some may say, this is a very partial answer to such objections, since it does not shew, that the things objected against are wise, just, and good: let us then attend to this further objection, and we shall find that the answers, which were given in Letter viii, Part I, to the objections against the wisdom, justice, and goodness, of the constitution of nature, will also answer objections made against the wisdom, justice, and goodness of christianity.

Now there were three observations which we employed to answer the objections against the wisdom, justice, and goodness of the constitution of nature ;— 1st, that it is a vast system imperfectly known by us ;— 2dly, that means are used in this system for accomplishing ends ;—and lastly, that it is carried on by general laws : and from these observations it appeared very probable, that the very things objected against may not only be consistent with wisdom, justice, and goodness, but even be instances of them ; and that the constitution of nature may be perfect in the highest possible degree. If, then, christianity be a system of the same kind, and from the same being, as it really is, then objections against its wisdom, justice, and goodness, may be answered in the same way.

First, then, christianity is a system or scheme quite beyond our comprehension. For as the moral government of God is a vast system gradually conducting things in such a manner, that every one shall finally receive according to his works ; and that truth and right, not fraud and violence, shall prevail at the last : so christianity is a particular scheme under, and a part of this vast system. Ever since the world came into its present wretched state, did a plan for its recovery commence under a divine person, the Messiah ; who, by a long mysterious œconomy, will finally unite all the just

in a kingdom of glory and happiness. And, as you are acquainted with the Scriptures, you will readily perceive, that the following is the outline of the christian system. First, that through a succession of ages different dispensations of providence, such as that of the patriarchs, of the law of Moses, and of the prophets, were given to man as *preparatory* to the advent of the Messiah;—secondly, that in the fulness of time, that time which infinite wisdom saw best, this divine person came into the world in a humble and despised manner, and suffered an ignominious death, for us men and for our salvation;—and, thirdly, that he rose from the dead on the third day, and afterwards ascended up into heaven, and there ever lives to make intercession for us, and has a name given unto him above every name, so that every knee should bow to him, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Further, that the Holy Ghost was sent at a particular time, in a miraculous manner, and now assists good men;—that Christ carries on an invisible government over his church, and will come at the end of the world to judge all men, and to give to every man according to his works; and that then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

Now, certainly, the whole, or any part of this scheme, is but very partially known by us; we do but know in part. For as in the constitution of nature, we soon find ourselves unable to comprehend any one part in all its connections; so is it in the constitution of christianity. You cannot take any one subject in nature, without being immediately convinced of your ignorance and incompetency to understand it fully; so also, if you examine the whole, or any one part of christianity, you will find, that though all things necessary to salvation are clear, yet you can know but very little of it. How, then, can you reasonably object against the wisdom, justice, and goodness of christianity, when you are so incompetent a judge? You have already seen, that your ignorance affords a sufficient answer to objections against the wisdom, justice, and goodness of the constitution of nature; much more, then, is it an answer to objections against the wisdom, justice, and goodness of christianity.

But, secondly, as in nature, so also in christianity, means are employed to accomplish ends. In nature many means accomplish ends, which, at first sight, they do not seem likely to accomplish; nay, many means appear quite contrary to their effects; and yet, considering all circumstances, are

the very best. This, then, shews, that though the things objected against christianity may appear to some *foolish*; yet they may be the very best means of accomplishing the very best ends; and their appearing *foolishness* to some, is in reality no argument against them, since they are parts of a scheme, which is so very far above our comprehension, and the reach of our capacity.

But, thirdly, it is credible that Christianity, as well as the course of nature, may have been carried on by general laws. But to ascertain this, let us consider upon what ground it is we say, that the course of nature is carried on by general fore-ordained laws.

Now, though we know some of the general laws of matter and of men's conduct and behaviour; yet we know almost nothing of the laws by which storms and tempests, earthquakes and famines occur, and become destructive to man; nor of the laws by which some men are so much superior to others, in their capacity and temper; nor of those laws by which thoughts come into our minds, in numberless cases; and by which myriads of things happen, that are of the greatest importance and influence in the affairs of life. To say that many of these things happen by chance, is to say nothing; for all reasonable men know certainly, that there is

no such thing as chance in reality. It is then by analogy we determine, that all things in nature are governed by general laws : for we see that the leading things in nature and men's conduct are reducible to general laws ; and hence we infer, since there is no such thing as chance, that all other things, which have the appearance of chance, may also be and are reducible to general laws. And this inference is perfectly just ; for as there is no such thing as chance, it follows, that all things in nature, and in men's conduct, are governed by general laws as much as the world is subject to gravitation.

Since, then, this is the case in nature, it is very probable that revelation, or God's miraculous interference with man, may also have been all along directed by *general* laws of wisdom ; and hence there is a full answer to objections against *particular* things in revelation, as being contrary to wisdom, justice, and goodness. It may have been by general laws that miraculous powers were exerted, in such a manner and place rather than any other ; and that the world at precise times received divine interpositions, and in such, and in no other, degrees and respects. But you must not think it a valid objection against revelation, that those laws are unknown to us ; for we do not know by what

laws some die in infancy, and others at extreme old age ; and that some are so superior in intellect and temper to others, though these things do certainly proceed from general laws. And as you have no reason to expect, that in nature every particular exigence should be provided for by general laws, so you have no reason to expect it in revelation ; though there may have been good reasons why revelation should be given by general laws, and that those laws should not be interfered with by other miraculous interpositions. And since the schemes of nature and of revelation are supposed to be both from God, it is certainly more than probable that they would be similar. Whatever deficiencies or irregularities, then, may appear, either in nature or in christianity, it is because we know but in part : we are not competent to judge fully of any part, much less of the whole scheme ; and, therefore, certainly, not competent to make objections against it.

Before I conclude this letter I would advert to an objection, which is sometimes made against the whole of christianity. Some say it makes God appear like man ; as if he, like man, was reduced to the necessity of using a long series of means to effect his designs, and is therefore derogatory to him.

But all nature shews the folly, the extreme folly of such an objection. Every thing in the world is carried on by means ; and is progressive : the fruits of the earth are ripened by means ; every blade of grass, and flower, that grows, is supported by means ; not to mention man, and brute animals. Every thing in nature is also progressive ; nothing seems perfect all at once. In corn there is the stalk, the blade, and then the full corn in the ear ; in man there is infancy, childhood, youth, and manhood : indeed, every part of our existence seems but a preparation by means for another part. God works in nature by slow and steady operations ; and why may it not be so in revelation ? Is it not most probable it will be so ? Admit, then, that the system of nature is from God, and nothing can be so futile as the objection we are now considering : for every part of nature is carried on by means ; and by means which, in many cases, seem very slow and tardy, but which are most effectual, and extend in their connections both backward and forward, far, very far, beyond our utmost view.

Since, then, you know so little, of the vast plan of christianity, but yet know enough for all practical purposes either of life or godliness, let it be your great care to attend to what you do know ;

which we cannot perfectly comprehend. 133

and not to harass yourself with futile objections because of things which you neither do nor can know.

Yours, very affectionately,

J. W.

LETTER V.

On the Appointment of a Mediator.

Cheam, July, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

THERE is nothing in christianity which Deists have more objected against, than the mediation of Christ. And not only do they object against his mediation, in that high and peculiar sense in which christians believe him to be their mediator, but against the whole notion of a mediator ; as being in itself, in any sense, absurd and unreasonable. But let us look at the analogy of nature ; and if you admit that the scheme of nature is of God's appointment, then will no part of christianity appear less liable to objection.

First, then, were not you, and are not all living creatures brought into the world, and chiefly supported in it, by the means and instrumentality, i. e. by the mediation of others ? The food you eat, the raiment you put on, and every enjoyment you have in life, are all more or less procured for you by the means of others ; and in many cases, by

unlikely means, and by those who hold the lowest and most despised ranks in society. Indeed, the the whole natural government of the world, is carried on by God through the means or mediation of one thing to another, and of man to man. If, then, God's natural government of the world be by the mediation of others, why may not his moral or religious? And since it is a mere matter of fact, that the natural government of the world is by the mediation of others; it certainly is much more probable that the religious is so also, than that it is not so. We find by experience, that God has so constituted the course of nature, that others are daily, nay incessantly the mediators of good to us, and sometimes the instruments or mediators of vengeance: there is, then, no ground of objection, from the light of nature, against the general doctrine of a mediator between God and man.

But, secondly, before we can in due order consider the *revealed* doctrine of the redemption of the world by Christ, we must suppose, or take for granted, that the world is under the proper *moral* government of God: let us then take distinct notice of this supposition. Now natural religion teaches us, that God's moral government of the world implies, that misery will be the consequences

of vice in some future state; yea, that his moral government *necessarily* implies, that misery will be the consequence of vice. But you do not know *all* the purposes or reasons why God has ordained that misery shall follow vice in futurity, and you are altogether ignorant *how* or by what means misery or punishment will follow or be inflicted; there is, therefore, no absurdity in supposing, that it may follow in a way similar to that in which, in this life, poverty follows dissipation and idleness, and sickness and untimely death follow intemperance or civil crimes. The punishments of a future state may follow vice, as a natural consequence; just as it follows of natural consequence, that if a man rashly trifles on a precipice he will fall, break his limbs, and finally perish, unless he gets help by the means or mediation of another. Nor does this supposition disparage the execution of God's justice; since it is to us perfectly the same, whether God inflicts punishment immediately by himself, or mediately by the natural course and progress of things.

Supposing, then, thirdly, that in a future state punishment will follow vice in the natural course of things, or by any other means; yet we find, according to the present constitution of nature, that the *bad natural consequences* of men's improper

actions do not always happen, or at least may often be prevented or remedied by the use of proper means. This, then, makes it probable, that by the use of proper means, the bad natural consequences of vice in futurity may also be prevented. God has so constituted the world, that though bad consequences naturally follow certain actions and conduct, yet still, in many cases, he has provided relief and remedies; and in some instances a perfect remedy, if we will use it. A certain kind of conduct, if persisted in, will often lead inevitably to loss of health, property, and life; and yet all this may be prevented by another proper kind of conduct. For instance, a man may prevent all the bad consequences of falling down a precipice, if he does not rashly trifle with it; and though he should fall, yet he may be saved, from utterly perishing, by the help of others, if he does not refuse their help: it is, then, a matter of experience, that God has so mercifully formed the world and the course of nature, that we of ourselves may do much, and still more by the help of others, to avoid and remedy the bad natural consequences of improper conduct: and since we find he has so constituted nature, that in many cases those bad natural consequences may be remedied or prevented, it is probable that he may have made provision also.

for remedying or preventing the future bad consequences of vice.

But though God should have made provision, for preventing the future consequences of vice; yet observe, fourthly, there is no probability that we alone and of ourselves could have prevented them: for you do not know *all* the reasons *why* future punishment will be inflicted, nor what will be *all* the future consequences of vice; and therefore you cannot tell whether any thing you could do could prevent them. Look also at the whole analogy of nature, and you will find, that in numberless cases, sorrow for past misconduct will neither prevent nor remedy its bad consequences. If, then, mere sorrow for misconduct in men's temporal capacity will not always prevent or remedy its bad consequences, what right have men to suppose, that mere sorrow will prevent the future bad consequences, i. e. the future punishment of vice? In nature also there are many diseases, in which the patient, so far from being able to effect his own cure, would inevitably destroy himself, were it not for the help—the mediation of others. The world also is so constituted, that you need the skill of the physician when your health is impaired; the assistance of friends, when your fortune is ruined; and the advice of the wise and prudent, when you have adopted wrong plans:

and still further, our natural ability to help ourselves is often so much lessened by our misconduct, that there is no possibility of our affairs being retrieved but by the aid and interposition of others. And since, then, this is your case in your temporal capacity, it is probable that it is so in your religious and moral: it is probable that we of ourselves could not prevent the future punishment of vice. The constant use also of propitiatory sacrifices among heathen nations plainly shews, that the idea of mere sorrow and repentance for sin being sufficient to obtain remission of it, is contrary to the general sense of mankind.

Upon the whole, then, it is evident, that we could not be *sure* that any thing we could do, could prevent the future punishment of vice; and also that some interposition might be necessary to make repentance efficacious.

As then, in the fifth place, analogy shews it probable, that we of ourselves could not prevent the future punishment of vice; so we find that revelation assures us we could not. Revelation tells us, and experience confirms it, that the world is in a wretched and lost estate; and that mere repentance is not of itself effectual to prevent the future punishment of wickedness. But at the same time revelation assures us, that the divine government admits of an interposition of mercy and good-

ness by means of a mediator, through whom the destruction of mankind may be prevented ; for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son; (John iii. 16.): that whosoever believeth in him should not perish : and the Son so loved the world, that he gave himself for us (Ephes. v. 2.). He once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God (1 Pet. iii. 18.). As in nature God gives us the help of others, without whose aid our temporal ruin would be certain ; so in religion, though in an infinitely higher degree, he gave us his Son to redeem us : and as a friend helps those whom he loves ; so did Christ, in a way infinitely beyond any thing human, effect our redemption, and do what was sufficient to prevent those future punishments from taking place, which according to the general laws of the divine government would have followed men's crimes, had it not been for his interposition. And surely there is nothing inconsistent with divine goodness in all this. It is true, indeed, that christianity supposes we are in a lost state ; this supposition seems the very ground of its being given to man ; but christianity did not put the world in this state, and surely it is not inconsistent with divine goodness, by an appointment of its own, to recover us, or to give us the means of recovery from it. Do but consider the extreme

misery that is in the world—the great wickedness that is among mankind—the wrong things that are even in the best of men—the progress that bad men, who form the bulk of the world, make in vice, as they advance in age;—consider also, that many heathens thought that this world was a place of punishment;—and you yourself must see, that it bears evident marks of ruin; and then you must feel little objection to the scripture doctrine of man's being in a state of degradation;—you cannot feel much difficulty in owning the fact, though unable to explain it in all respects.

Nor can any valid objection lie against the doctrine, of this degradation being in consequence of the crime of our first parents; for the whole analogy of nature shews, that the crimes of parents often entail in this world, not only misery, but irremediable misery, poverty, and ruin, upon their posterity: and the constant use of means or mediation in the natural world, in communicating good from man to man, removes all objection against the general doctrine of Christ's interposition to recover the world, and to reconcile us to God.

But it may be necessary, sixthly, to consider the particular manner in which the Scriptures represent Christ as our mediator: and this will be best done by considering him, as divines generally do, as a prophet, a king, and a priest.

Now as a prophet he taught men the way of God in truth, and how he ought to be obeyed and served. He republished the law of nature with increased clearness and obligations; and informed us of many things which reason of itself could not have discovered. He distinctly revealed the manner by which repentance might be made efficacious, and in which God ought to be worshipped; and he gave men the most certain assurance of their own resurrection, and of a future state of rewards and punishments. He left us also a perfect example of purity and truth, and was in all respects *the prophet*.

As a king, he has a kingdom which is not of this world. This kingdom is his church; or all faithful and good men in the world, who live in obedience to his laws, and who will be received by him into heaven. Over this kingdom he exercises an invisible government and influence by his spirit; so that all his subjects may go through a proper state of discipline, and be fitted for that state of happiness which he is gone to prepare for them. And, as a king, he will come at the last day to reward his faithful subjects, and to punish all those who have resisted his authority.

And, as a priest, Christ made atonement for us by his own death and passion. Now I mention this last, because it is most objected against. But

you know that sacrifices were in use in all ages among Gentiles and Jews ; and that no good account can be given of their origin, unless you suppose them to originate in revelation. You know also the Gentiles thought, that their sacrifices had an efficacy : and as for the Jews, they were assured that their sacrifices had an efficacy in some degree, when offered up in faith and piety ; and also had a typical reference to the sacrifice of Christ, who *now once in the end of the world appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself* (Heb. ix. 26.). But say you, *how* is Christ's death and passion, or sacrifice, efficacious to the obtaining of pardon from God of our sins ? I answer, I cannot tell. Nor can you tell, *how* the volition of your mind makes your finger move, or *how* rain and heat are efficacious to make a blade of grass grow. You have, then, no right to object against the atonement of Christ, because you cannot see how it is efficacious. The gospel plainly reveals its efficacy ; that through it our repentance is accepted, and we are put into a state or capacity of escaping future punishment, and obtaining everlasting happiness. To object, then, against Christ's atonement, because you cannot see *how* it is efficacious, is most unreasonable ; for you cannot fully explain how any one thing in nature produces the effects which you see it does daily produce.

But let us now, in the seventh place, briefly review the observations already made on the appointment of a mediator. Now, since you neither know *how* future punishment would have followed vice, nor the manner of its infliction, nor *all* the reasons for its infliction; and since you know not the particular nature of that happiness which Christ has gone to prepare for his disciples, nor how far any thing you could do, could of itself prevent the future punishment of your crimes; it follows, that *antecedent to revelation*, you could not tell whether a mediator was or was not necessary to prevent future punishment, and secure to you future happiness. Let it then be supposed that a mediator was necessary, you could not tell, *antecedent to revelation*, what would be the *whole* of his office, or what he should have to do or suffer in fulfilling it. It follows, then, that you are not adequate to judge, what was or was not fit for him to do or suffer; to object therefore against any thing which he did or suffered, because you do not see all the reasons for it, or how it is efficacious, is to the highest degree unreasonable. Surely it never can follow that because we do not see *how* the death and passion of Christ avail to our redemption, that therefore they do not avail; and still more especially, when you consider, that we do not

now perfectly *how* any one thing in nature avails to produce another.

But some say, does not the doctrine of Christ's suffering for us, represent God as indifferent whether he punishes the innocent or the guilty? But what will this objection prove against christianity, that it will not prove in a much higher degree against the whole scheme of nature. The world is so constituted, that the innocent suffer daily for the faults of the guilty. It is matter of constant experience, that children suffer on account of the faults of their parents; and that millions endure distress and privations on account of the evil passions of a very few. You cannot therefore hold such an objection, unless you renounce even Deism, and profess yourself an Atheist; and even then the objection would lie equally, as it does now upon supposition of a God, against the course of nature. Admit therefore that the world is governed by God, which you know I take for granted, and for any thing you can tell to the contrary, the sufferings of Christ for us, may be of the same kind, as what we see takes place in the world every day. Remember also that Christ's sufferings were *voluntary*; whereas the sufferings of the great bulk of innocent people, on account of the faults of others, are *involuntary*. If then there is any force in this objection, it is

more against the scheme of nature than christianity more against the deist than the christian. It is true that God will reward every man according to his works: But this will be the completion of his plan of moral government; and in conducting his plan to this point, you cannot tell but vicarious punishment might be necessary. You daily see numbers, who would be ruined in their temporal capacity, were it not for the interposition of others; an interposition which often costs them much pain, trouble and grief: you daily see that one man's sufferings do actually contribute to the benefit and relief of others in their present state; why then may not Christ's sufferings be beneficial to us, in our religious capacity? According to the course of nature, i. e. the appointment of God, vicarious punishment occurs constantly among men, and we are not surprized at it, nay, we think it natural; Christ's sufferings then may even naturally contribute to procure for us the highest benefits. Indeed, the whole of the objection we are now considering, amounts to this; that an appointment made by an *infinite* being, cannot be necessary or expedient, because a *finite* being cannot see it necessary or expedient.

Lastly; you have certainly no reason to expect the same information respecting God's conduct and appointments as your own duty. In nature God

instructs you, not by reason, but by experience; by experience he tells you what are the bad consequences of such and such actions, and how in general you should act, though you know scarcely any thing of the vast plans of his providence. So also is it in religion: your duty is clearly revealed; but you have no right to expect an equally clear revelation of all his plans and appointments in religion; especially when you find you have it not in natural providence. Because you do not see why God should appoint a mediator, does it follow that he either should or would not appoint one? You cannot understand or explain all the system of nature, why then should you expect to be able to understand or explain all the system of religion or grace? Surely the deity may have reasons for *his appointments* that we cannot comprehend: but as for *our duty* its reasons are plain; and the nature of the thing speaks for itself. Our duty to observe public institutions in religion is evident; since without them, it could neither be supported nor propagated among mankind: and our regard, our worship and love to Christ are necessary; since they arise from the relations in which he stands unto us. Supposing then a mediator appointed by God, you have no more reason to object against it, because you cannot see all the reasons for it; than you have to object against

a medicine which cures you of a disease, because you cannot, as you really cannot, see the mode of its operation.

I am yours, very sincerely,

J. W.

LETTER VI.

*On Revelation not being universal; and its Proof
being supposed to be defective.*

Cheam, August, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

THERE are some who think that a revelation cannot be true, if its evidence appears doubtful; because, say they, God would not leave it to rest upon doubtful evidence: others also object to revelation, because it is not universal.

But what do such objectors take for granted? Why, what is most unreasonable; viz. that God cannot bestow a favour upon man, unless he gives it just in that manner in which we think he should; and that he cannot bestow a blessing upon any one, unless he bestows it upon all. But does not the whole analogy of nature contradict such suppositions, and shew that such things cannot be taken for granted? For myriads enjoy temporal advantages

which myriads of others have not; and God gives what may be called natural favours, in a way very different from what we might expect. Have all men the poetic talents of a Milton; the mathematical powers of a Newton or a Cotes; or the reasoning capacity of a Locke? You see constant instances of one man's superiority over another in his mind, knowledge, state and circumstances in common life. God does grant favours to some, in their temporal capacity, which he does not grant to others; and he grants those favours in a way quite different from what we might expect: to suppose then that revelation must be given as we might expect, is to suppose what is in direct opposition to the whole analogy of nature.

But still some one will say, is not the evidence for revelation doubtful? And if so, how can it be from God? Well, let us admit for the sake of argument, that the evidence for revelation is doubtful; and I ask, have you always demonstrative evidence for your temporal conduct? Do you always know certainly *how* you should act, as an inhabitant of this world merely? So far from this being the case, you are obliged to act in general upon mere probability; and in numberless instances, in which the probability is against your success. This then being your state in your temporal capacity, and I take for granted that this state is according to God's appoint-

ment, it follows, that you cannot object to revelation, the doubtfulness of its evidence; since the evidence for your conduct even in common life is doubtful. The farmer does not know *demonstratively* that he shall have a crop next year, which will be worth his labour and expence in preparing the ground; but you would not think him wise, if he neglected to prepare his ground for want of *demonstrative* evidence of a good crop next year. The evidence, or proof of success in men's temporal affairs, seems to hang constantly in doubt, in consequence of their liability to change of temper and taste; and in consequence of their exposure to ill health, to accidents, and untimely death. The best arranged plans are liable to many and great objections; and yet men do and ought to undertake them, because of the good which will result from them if successful: but yet all plans of worldly and temporal prudence are so precarious, that success at best is but probable. The deceit of others also often imposes on us; and hence it becomes very doubtful in numberless cases how we should act in our temporal capacity: and yet act we must, and according to what is prudent and right. Look at the gifts of Providence, and you will find them given in the most promiscuous way; you will find, that as no two persons are exactly alike in shape and features, so no two are exactly alike in capacity,

constitution and temper, or in the circumstances of their temporal state. Some have almost every natural means of success and improvement; whilst others have to struggle with constant difficulties and opposition. And yet, amidst all this uncertainty and inequality, there is such a thing as a proper, prudent conduct, which men are bound to observe; and which they must observe, if they wish to pass through life with any comfort whatever: So also in religion, admitting its evidence to be doubtful, there is an attention and regard of the highest degree due to it.

If you consider the Jewish and Christian revelations, you will perceive, that even they have appeared at different times with different degrees of evidence to those who believed in them. The Jews, who lived from the times of Moses to the captivity, had stronger evidence for the truth of their religion; than they who lived from the times of the captivity to the coming of Christ. And the first Christians, in consequence of seeing the miracles which were wrought in proof of the Gospel, and the change which took place in men's lives in consequence of believing it, had stronger evidence of its truth than we have. And, on the other hand, we, or future generations, may have proofs of its truth which they could not have; for we may see the fulfilment of many important prophecies which they could

not see. Moreover only suppose, as is indeed the fact, that some nations, as well as individuals, have received no light from the scriptures;—that others have had some indirect advantages from them, but yet never properly enjoyed either them or their evidence;—that some have had the scriptures fully, but yet have had them mixed with the greatest fables, false miracles, and corruptions;—and that others, who have them in their genuine simplicity, are yet very ignorant of their contents, and know little more than how they ought in general to regulate their lives: I say, suppose all this, and you may easily find clear analogies in the course and natural government of the world, which will correspond with it. You will find that the same things hold good in our temporal as well as in our religious capacity: that civilization, for instance, is at a high pitch in some countries, though many crimes are committed and much ignorance subsists in them;—that in other countries the people are just emerging from barbarism;—and that in others they are mere savages.

Nor is there any thing harsh in man's religious state being so unequal, when you reflect, that every man shall be dealt with equitably; and that God will make us accountable for what we have, and not for what he never gave us. But because some men have only a little light or knowledge in matters of

religion, are they not to strive to get more? It might as well be affirmed, that a man, ignorant in his temporal capacity, should not endeavour to increase his knowledge. Every thing also in the natural œconomy of the world is progressive, and even *like* things *vary* very much in their state and circumstances. Christianity, therefore, for any thing we can tell, should also be progressive both among nations and individuals; there may be wise reasons why the state of man should in religion be similar to what it is in temporals;—should be very various and different. There may be wise and just reasons, in the general conduct of Providence, why creatures of *like* moral capacity should, as it respects religion, be placed in *different* circumstances. Every day's experience shews them differently situated, as it respects their present temporal capacity; the same thing then may be perfectly proper and right in their religious capacity.

Indeed the system both of natural and revealed religion implies great variety; for as a system, it must consist of very different and various parts. Nay, let revelation be universal; yet even then men's religious state would be very different: for the difference in their capacities, their length of life, and external circumstances; the variety in their bodily health and constitution, and in their tempers and dispositions, would make perhaps as much inequa-

lity in their religious state as now actually exists. But should any still complain, either of their own or the circumstances of others in religion, let them attend to the following practical reflections.

First, then, there is no reason why the *exercise* of our *understanding* upon religion and its evidence, may not form part of our state of probation: and hence, it may form a particular part of some men's moral trial, that the evidence of christianity appears doubtful to them. The very doubtfulness of the evidence, admitting it to be doubtful, gives scope for the exercise of a virtuous examination, or a vitious neglect of its truth. Our understanding, as well as our general conduct, is much under our own power; we are therefore accountable for its use: and there is no doubt, but the same inward principle, which incites a man to obey the precepts of christianity *after* a conviction of its truth, would also invite him diligently to examine its evidence *before* a conviction of its truth. To neglect the due consideration of the truth and evidence of christianity, since it is a matter of such vast importance, is really as immoral and depraved, as to live vitiously when you believe it: and, on the other hand, seriously to weigh its evidence, is the exercise of a right general moral principle and disposition. Hence, then, it follows, that the consideration of the truth and evidence of christianity, affords scope

and opportunity for right and wrong behaviour, as much as any thing can do. It is admitted, that the evidence of the truth of christianity is not intuitive; duly then to consider that evidence affords great opportunity for religious probation: and as men attend to and treat the subject, so do they shew what is their moral character, and what is in their hearts.

But, secondly, suppose that the evidence of christianity is doubtful to the highest supposeable degree, yet even then you will be in a state of *general probation*. For if you had the *least suspicion* that you owed all your temporal welfare to the interest and kindness of a certain person, you could not, if you had any gratitude or even prudence, you could not regard him with the same indifference, as if you had *no* such suspicion: so also, the *least suspicion* that christianity is true, and that your spiritual welfare depends on Christ, lays you under a positive obligation to regard him. Certainty and doubt are assuredly very different things; but doubt itself implies some degree of evidence: and hence, in a subject of such moment as christianity, even doubt should beget in you a serious practical apprehension of its truth. The very *possibility* of the truth of christianity binds us, on every principle of common sense and prudence, to be anxious about religion, whether natural or revealed;—to keep at the utmost distance from every degree of profane-

ness ;—and to maintain great reverence for a subject of such high importance. So that in reality there is very little difference between the moral obligations of those who fully believe christianity, and those who do not believe it ; the difference is much less than men in general seem to think. And hence, even they who doubt, are bound to form in them that character, of which they are, who truly and practically believe the Gospel. Those also, who doubt, should remember, that they do more harm or good in society, by their contempt or regard for christianity, than they can do by behaving ill or well in the common concerns of life : and hence they must be accountable for their regard of it, even admitting its evidence to be doubtful. In common life men are often bound to act upon the lowest degree of probability ; surely then they must not suppose that they are not bound to act in the matter of christianity, unless the evidence be overbearing and demonstrative.

But, thirdly, the difficulties, or the doubtfulness of the evidence of christianity, may be a matter of moral trial to some ; in the same way as temptations to vice, and difficulties in the discharge of practical duty, are a moral trial to others. Difficulties in the discharge of duty improve our moral state and character ; so also may difficulties in the evidence of christianity. In this world it is plain that we are in

a state of trial and temptation, and that the dangers of our state serve to shew, what is our real character; so also, some men's particular trial of character, may be the difficulties which they find in the evidence of religion: for many appear to have little or no difficulty in the discharge of the common duties of life, who yet are not satisfied respecting the truth of christianity. And this seems to be the touch stone for the trial of their character; for the importance of christianity makes it a subject of the deepest speculative and practical attention. It is no more a reason why men should reject revelation, because its evidence is doubtful; than that they should do what may ruin their temporal interest, because the evidence is, as in fact it often is, doubtful, whether they will be detected. The very difficulties, which attend the evidence of revelation, demand, and are a ground for more care and attention in examining it; and for a greater exercise of that virtuous principle, which yields to any real, though doubtful evidence. Men are accountable for their internal as well as their external conduct; and they are bound duly to exercise their reasoning powers, as well as their bodily faculties. But some seem in general to exercise their bodily faculties aright, and to have little or no trouble in conducting themselves properly, who may yet need a higher discipline;—the discipline of the mind. They may

need a discipline, by which they must give a greater proof of their moral character than mere external conduct can amount to.

Hitherto I have supposed that men's doubts about revelation do not arise from any fault of their own: but is this always, or often the case? Do their doubts never arise from carelessness or levity? It is to be feared they often do. If men, beforehand, secretly wish christianity was not true;—if they are more attentive to objections than positive evidence, and indulge a spirit of cavil and ridicule;—if they look more at human error than divine truth;—and many do all this;—then surely such people are not in a likely way to see the truth of christianity, though its proof amounted to demonstration. You know, that if men become careless and frivolous in thinking of and managing their temporal affairs, they impair their capacity of reasoning, and lose, or lessen their power of prudent conduct: so also is it in religion; for by indulging an improper temper and disposition on the subject, they render themselves incapable of perceiving what is true. They are like men infatuated with ease and pleasure, who neither can nor wish to see their danger. The propositions in Euclid are reducible to intuitive principles; but yet most of these propositions require great exercise of mind before their truth can be perceived; and numbers never do

perceive it, because they will not take the necessary trouble: so also in christianity, numbers from idleness, from passion, and prejudice, may be incapable of perceiving its truth; and hence may be given up to that ignorance and blindness, of which they themselves are the cause.

But whatever doubts some men may raise about either natural or revealed religion, yet the general proof of both is level to the capacity of common men;—of those who are chiefly employed in procuring the necessaries of life for themselves and families. Common men can see the proofs of the being of God, and of his moral government over the world; and they perceive also that he has given them a moral capacity, or a nature which must be under moral regulation. They can see also that christianity agrees with this moral nature; and that miracles were wrought, and prophecies completed in proof of the Gospel. But yet doubts may be raised against this proof; doubts which cannot be answered so as fully to satisfy mere curiosity. Nor should you be surprised at this; for there is no one thing in nature about which doubts and difficulties may not be raised, which cannot be answered. But still the proof of christianity is not lost in these doubts; it remains full and entire for all practical purposes. And hence, if men will raise subtle speculative difficulties about christianity, which may

also be raised about the most common things in nature, they are bound to examine it with vast care and diligence; with much greater attention than they generally do. But numbers are mere collectors of objections, mere retailers of what they hear from others; they will not seriously examine the subject, and hence they must remain in ignorance, as they must do with regard to any science which they will not study.

But still, some may object and say, that if a prince or master were to give orders to his subjects or servants, he would take care that his orders should not be doubtful either as it respects their authority or meaning. But the answer to this is easy. For first, you know so little of the divine government, that you cannot justly conclude, from what is merely human, what the divine ought to be: secondly, you know that God does not give you *certain* proof and information respecting your temporal affairs; you are obliged incessantly to act upon mere probability, and according to experience. God has so constituted the world, as not to give you *certain* proof or evidence of the manner in which you should always act; what is most probable, not what is demonstrative, is the great rule of common life: and if he has so constituted the course of the world, why may it not be so in religion? But, thirdly, all that a prince regards, is the doing or performing of

his orders; he looks only to the accomplishment of the *external* event, and is indifferent to the motive which influences his subjects. But God chiefly regards the motives of our actions; and hence, our fidelity to him is brought to the test by those very doubts which may be raised against revelation. Moreover, if an earthly prince wished to prove and try the loyalty of his subjects, he would leave his orders in doubt, that he might see how they would act: the very doubtfulness of his orders would afford an opportunity of proving their real character. So also God's government is so constituted as to prove what is *in* man, and to shew what he really is. In matters of religion men must shew from what principles they act, and whether a regard for God and piety is their ruling motive; and hence the very doubtfulness in the evidence or proof of revelation serves to prove their true character.

Finally, a state of religion *necessarily* implies in this world a state of probation. Admit then that we are in a state of religion, and there is no peculiar difficulty in supposing that our probation may consist, in a great degree, in being bound to act upon evidence which is not demonstrative, i. e. which is doubtful; since this is actually our temporal state, for we must generally act, as inhabitants of this world, upon doubtful evidence. You cannot assert, *from the reason of the thing*, that our religious

trial can only be, whether we will or will not act in opposition to *demonstrative* evidence; for ignorance and doubt do as really give room and scope for probation, as certainty and intuition, may more so. It is equally religious probation, to examine carefully the evidence for revelation, and to act according to that evidence, though doubtful; as it is to have difficulties in obeying the precepts of revelation. Indeed *experience* shews, that you cannot have that evidence which is necessary for you in your temporal capacity, unless you will take pains to acquire it: you have to learn what you ought to do; and often to learn it by long and painful attention. Men's passions also and their prejudices very often deceive them, so that they hide or avoid the real evidence of a case: like men, whose affairs are desperate, they will not examine the state of their accounts. Nor is it mere idleness or profligacy that exposes us to ruin in our temporal capacity; for very often our ruin may be effected by what may be called small imprudencies and want of care. Since then this is our present state and condition in mere worldly matters; those, who believe the constitution of the world to be according to God's appointment, have no right to suppose that, in matters of revelation, they ought to be free from all care and attention, either as it respects its evidence or its precepts. They should reflect, that in common life they must

necessarily act upon evidence which is much below what is commonly called probable;—that they have to guard, not only against what they fully believe *will* happen, but against what they think it possible *may* happen;—and that they must often engage in pursuits when the probability is against their success. Admitting then that the evidence for revelation is doubtful; yet still all levity and inattention towards a subject of such vast importance, must be to the highest degree improper and unreasonable. If revelation should be true, and no man can prove it cannot, how awful must be their state who despise and deride it, or even pass it over with careless indifference.

Yours, very affectionately,

J. W.

LETTER VII.

*On the positive or particular Evidence for
Christianity.*

Cheam, Sept. 1809.

MY DEAR SIR,

WE have hitherto been employed chiefly in considering the presupposed presumptions and objections against christianity or revelation; it remains for us now to attend to the *particular and positive* evidence or proof of its truth, and to compare that evidence with the evidence which we admit in common life, and upon which we must of necessity act. It is but little indeed which I can state to you upon this point, compared with what might be and has been said upon it; I would therefore take this opportunity of recommending to your most careful perusal, Grotius on the Truth of the Christian Religion; Bishop Newton on the Prophecies, and Paley's Evidences; for in these works you will find

the positive evidence for christianity detailed at length, and with singular felicity and ability. The view, which I shall present to you of the subject, will be chiefly to shew how far it corresponds with the analogy of nature, and the plain natural rule of judging and acting in our common concerns and temporal capacity.

Now the direct and fundamental proofs of christianity are two things,—*miracles and prophecy*; and though there are many other proofs of great weight, yet they ought always to be joined with these two. Let us then, first, consider miracles and prophecy; and point out what the analogy of nature suggests in answer to objections made against them: and, secondly, let us unite both the direct and collateral evidence into one general argument; and hence we shall see, that the evidence and proofs of the truth of christianity is a long series of things reaching from the beginning of the world to the present times; and that the subject must be viewed as one great whole made up of many parts.

First, then, as it respects miracles, you must mark, that there is the *same historical evidence* for the miracles of Moses and the prophets, as for the common civil history either of themselves, or of the kings and people of the Jews: so also, there is the *same historical evidence* in the Gospels and the acts, for the miracles of Christ and his Apostles, as for

the common events related in them. The miracles, both of the Old and New Testament, are related in a plain unadorned narrative like the common matters of fact; they are told without any attempt to surprise or please, which is not the case with those authors, who make it their study to entertain, and hence introduce the mention of miracles at agreeable intervals. Observe also, that those parts of Scripture, which contain the account of miracles sufficient in themselves to prove the truth of christianity, have been quoted as genuine down from the age in which they were written to the present times; and that no good account can be given of the establishment, either of the Jewish or Christian religion, but upon supposition of the miracles being wrought, which are said to have been wrought when they were founded. If you ask also, how came the Scripture History to be received in the world as true, the most plain and obvious answer is, because it is true; nor can any other answer be given which will fairly account for the fact. Hence then it follows, that the Scripture History, both of miracles and common events, is an authentic genuine history; unless positive proof can be given to the contrary, which never has, nor I believe, ever can be given: or at least, it follows, that the Scripture History, both of miracles and common events, cannot be rejected as of *no* authority.

Secondly, it is plain that St. Paul's Epistles, both on account of the nature of epistolary writing, and of their being addressed not to particular persons but to churches, carry an evidence of their being genuine; and of the truth of christianity, beyond mere historical narration. In particular, the first Epistle to the Corinthians is proved genuine by being quoted by Clemens Romanus (Ep. 1. c. 47.) in an epistle of his own addressed to that church. Indeed the genuineness of St. Paul's epistles cannot be doubted by any *particular* pretext whatever, which in such a case is the only thing to be regarded; for, as for doubts arising from *general* pretexts, there is no one matter of fact against which they may not be raised. But on this subject, let me request you carefully to peruse Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*. However, it may be of moment to observe, that St. Paul's testimony is to be considered as distinct from the rest of the Apostles; for he declares (Gal. i.) that he received the Gospel not from man, but from Christ himself;—that he (Rom. xv. 19. 2 Cor. xii. 12.) had the power of working miracles;—and that some (1. Cor. xiv.) abused their miraculous powers. In many parts of his epistles, he also mentions miraculous gifts and powers, as a thing well known and quite familiar to those to whom he wrote; and sometimes he speaks of them quite incidentally, as

one would about a matter which is known to all people.

Observe, thirdly, it is an acknowledged fact, that christianity at first laid claim to belief upon the ground of miracles being wrought in proof of its divine origin; and that vast numbers did believe in it upon that very ground. Now this particularly distinguishes christianity, as including both the Old and New Testament dispensations, from all other religions; for no other religion appears to lay claim to public miracles for its foundation. Since then christianity laid claim to belief upon the ground of miracles, and vast numbers did believe in it upon that very ground, and expose themselves to the greatest persecutions and distresses on account of their attachment to the Gospel; it follows, that they fully believed in the miracles being wrought. Hence, then, we have, not only the evidence of the Scriptures for the truth of the christian miracles, but the evidence also of the first christians in addition: and certainly it is a great corroboration to a history, when great numbers, contemporary with the historian, bear testimony to the same facts; as is the case with the first christians and the writers of the New Testament history. But perhaps you will say, men are credulous; true: but are they not also suspicious, and backward to believe what is strange; and still more, to practise what is against their ease and present quiet? The persecu-

tions, then, which the first christians underwent in performing their duty as christians, and the natural suspicion of the human mind, is more than a sufficient answer to the argument, drawn from man's credulity, against the Gospel miracles. The education, the manners, and the prejudices of the first christians, and the whole system of heathen worship and civil power were in opposition to the Gospel; the conversion, then, of such numbers of men under the circumstances which accompanied its first promulgation, is a strong presumption that christianity rested upon a foundation of divine power and authority.

But it is said, in opposition to christianity, that enthusiasm has often impelled men to suffer the greatest hardships, and to give up their lives, for the most idle follies and absurd opinions. Well; without stopping to enquire about enthusiasm, which after all very few people understand, let us grant this: yet facts and opinions are quite different things; for no testimony can be a proof of wild or enthusiastic opinions, or indeed of any opinions whatever; but testimony is, and ever must be, by the necessity of our nature, a proof of facts. If, then, a person dies in support of facts, which was really the case with the Apostles, it is a proof that he believed those facts: now there is no doubt the Apostles believed the facts for which they suffered; and as they were

facts, of which they were competent to judge, and of which their senses could determine, it follows, that these facts, upon every mode of thinking and acting in life, must be admitted as true. And not only the Apostles, but the first christian martyrs also had full means of ascertaining the truth of the Gospel miracles; and as they chose rather to suffer every evil than deny those miracles, their testimony for them is a proof of their truth. The Apostles and first martyrs gave their dying testimony to the truth of facts, of the truth of which they were perfectly competent to judge; we are bound then to receive their testimony according to every principle upon which we act in life.

But if men are enthusiastic, say you, does it not lessen the regard due to their testimony even of facts? Well, let it be so: yet, if a number of intelligent men, under no improper influence, assert that they heard or saw such and such things, then is such testimony the strongest you can have for any fact, excepting that of your own senses. Such testimony you must receive, unless it asserts things absolutely incredible in themselves; or unless it can be opposed by contrary testimony of a proper kind. But on the subject of christianity this cannot be done; for we have already shewn that it is not a thing incredible in itself; and you well know that there is no opposing testimony against it. For the truth of

those facts upon which christianity rests, you have the testimony of numbers of honest, able, and upright men: to say, then, that enthusiasm lessens the regard due to their testimony, is really saying nothing against christianity; for this is taking for granted that they *were* enthusiastic, which is not admitted. Besides, it has been proved that revelation is not a thing incredible in itself; and that miracles are not incredible; and since you have no opposing testimony to that of the Apostles and first martyrs respecting the christian miracles, you must then either admit their testimony, or act contrary to your whole conduct in your temporal capacity.

But still, say some, might not the Apostles be deceived; and hence, without intending it deceive others? To this I answer, if men will make suppositions, they may suppose any thing. But has it ever been proved, even to the lowest degree of probability, that the Apostles were deceived? It never has; and hence, to make suppositions of what might be, and then to reason and act against christianity as if the things were true, is, especially on such a question, most unreasonable and absurd. When a matter of fact is tried before a jury, and the positive evidence is all on one side, and no opposing evidence on the other; would they give a verdict on the other side, upon supposition that the witnesses, who gave the positive evidence, *might* be deceived? Surely,

then, it is most unreasonable to refuse assent to the Gospel upon supposition of what might be, when there is such positive evidence for its truth. Men, it is well known, are liable to deception and to great wickedness, and hence often seek to deceive others; yet from the very constitution of our nature, human testimony is and must be a proof of facts: surely, then, the testimony of the Apostles ought to be received, against whom no proof of being deceived, or of endeavouring to deceive others, can be brought.

But is there not much historical evidence for fabulous miracles, says another objecter? Granted: yet this proves nothing against christianity; for fabulous miracles have been proved such, but the christian miracles never have. When one evidence is destroyed by contrary evidence, it does not follow that another evidence is false, which is *not* confuted: nor does it follow, that because a man of general good character has been proved guilty of perjury in a case, with which another man of equally good character had nothing to do, that therefore that other man ought not to be trusted. Much less, then, does it follow, that because some men have given their testimony in support of miracles proved to be fabulous, that therefore the testimony of the Apostles is not to be received for the christian miracles, which cannot be proved fabulous. Surely it was never supposed, that because some men have been guilty of

perjury in our courts of justice, that therefore no human testimony ought to be received; and equally absurd is it to suppose, that because some men have borne testimony to fabulous miracles, that therefore no testimony should be received for the christian miracles, which never have been shewn to be false. In fine, though men from various causes are liable to be deceived, and will often deceive others; and though this may lessen, yet it never can destroy human testimony in any case: for nothing can destroy it, excepting opposing testimony, or absolute incredibility in the thing; or a proof or probability that the persons who give evidence are incompetent to judge of what they assert, or are improperly influenced. Till this be done, the *natural* laws of human life lay us under an absolute necessity of admitting human testimony: and men must not suppose, that the great mass of historical evidence for the christian miracles can be overturned by saying that the Apostles *might* be deceived; for in common life no such reasoning can be admitted. Indeed, when men say, that the Apostles might be deceived, this itself is a tacit confession that they think they perceive *some* evidence for the truth of the Gospel miracles; and if *some*, if *any*, then what an awful idea is it, even at the least, that christianity *may* be true.

Having now laid before you a few reflections upon the evidence for the christian miracles, and upon the

objections made against that evidence, let me proceed to state to you a few brief observations upon prophecy ;—observations which are suggested by the natural and necessary rules of judging in matters of common life.

First, then, let it be admitted that some parts of the Scripture prophecies are obscure ; yet this does not invalidate the proof of foresight in those parts which are understood, and which appear to be completed. Because you cannot discern certain objects at a distance, so as to determine what they are ; it does not follow, that you cannot distinguish objects which are near to you : because you do not understand *all* the passages of a book, it certainly does not follow that you understand *none* of them. If you had a letter sent to you, part of which was plain, and contained facts well known to most people, and part in cypher, or in a language you did not understand ; you certainly would not suppose, that if you understood the whole of the letter, it would thence follow that the writer did not know the well known facts which it contained. Now in Scripture there are many prophecies which appear clearly and fully accomplished ; the obscurities then which exist with respect to some prophecies, cannot prove want of foresight in others which are evidently fulfilled. Common men, it is true, from want of education and reading, cannot perceive the *minute* accomplish-

ment of several prophecies, nor, indeed, in some instances can the most learned; yet still there is an evident fulfilment, in a general way, of many predictions, which proves a foresight beyond what is human; and that certain events, which have taken place, were intended by these very predictions.

Secondly, if a long series of prophecies can be applied to a long series of events, this is a proof that those prophecies intended these events. Now a long series of prophecies in the Scriptures can be applied to a long series of events; for there are many predictions, which were delivered at very various and distant times, which are applicable to Christ;—to the present state of the christian church;—and of the political kingdoms of the world: and this conformity is a proof that these predictions were intended of Christ, and the events to which they apply. If a long satire was put into your hands, which you could apply to the leading men, and principal events in politics of the present times; you would think you had found out its meaning, and you would have good ground for so thinking: in like manner, since a long series of Scripture prophecies, which were delivered some thousands of years ago, are applicable to Christ, and to the present state both of the church and of the political kingdoms of the world, it follows, that these prophecies intended these events, and are a proof of more than human foresight. Upon this

subject you should also remember that the Jews, *before* the coming of Christ, interpreted the prophecies respecting him in much the same way as we do now *after* his coming; and that the primitive christians interpreted the prophecies respecting the church and the state of the world from the times of Christ to the present times, as events seem to have very clearly fulfilled.

But, thirdly, let it be admitted that the prophets did not understand the full meaning of their predictions, and that their predictions are capable of being applied to other events than those to which christians in general apply them; yet even this will not confute the argument drawn from prophecy in support of christianity. For observe, first, the meaning of a book or writing, is nothing but the meaning of the author. But the prophets are not properly the authors of their predictions, or the writings which contain them; for to say they are, is to take for granted that they were not inspired, the very thing which the deist has to prove: and if not properly the authors of their predictions, then it follows, that what *they* might think their meaning is not *necessarily* so. Observe, secondly, that if a man was to compile a book from original documents furnished him by a person of much superior knowledge, and who perfectly understood the documents; it would not follow, that you knew the whole meaning of the book

because you knew the whole meaning of the compiler; for it is plain, the compiler might in many things be mistaken. Supposing, then, that the prophets were inspired, it follows that they can only be considered as compilers; and hence their predictions may have a further meaning than what they saw and understood. The question, then, is not what the prophets thought was the meaning of their predictions, no, nor what we may think is the meaning; but, has a series of prophecies been fulfilled in a natural and proper sense of the words? And this certainly has been done, so as to give decisive proof of foresight more than human, independent of what the prophets might think was the meaning of their predictions. There certainly is a series of prophecies applicable to Christ, and to the present state of the world and of the christian church, so as to imply and prove more than human foresight, and hence to shew that these prophecies were from God.

But let us now proceed to the second division of this subject, and unite in one view the *direct* and *circumstantial* evidence for christianity: but to do this at any proper length would require a very large work of itself; you must not then expect any thing more than a mere outline of the subject, if so much. It may also be necessary to state, before we enter immediately upon the subject, that the evidence for the truth of the Gospel is not merely certain *direct*

and *express* things, but others also which are circumstantial; and that all of them, both direct and circumstantial, are to be united in one great argument, as well as to be considered separately. You should remember also, that all questions of evidence are determined by considering what is circumstantial as well as what is direct, and uniting them together; and that very often we must determine matters of fact by circumstantial evidence only.

Now, what we assert and enquire into is this,—that God by *external revelation*, in addition to our natural reason and affections, has given us an account of himself, and of his moral government over the world; a moral government which includes a future state of rewards and punishments: and that he has also given us a particular dispensation of Providence, called the Gospel, which human reason never could have discovered; and which contains a particular system of religion for the recovery of man from his present wretched and sinful state.

Now this revelation may be considered as *wholly* historical: for its prophecies are the history of events before they occur; and its doctrines may be treated as facts. As a history it particularly treats of the world as God's world: it shews us that he made it;—that he is the only object of worship;—and that the idols and gods which the heathens worshipped were no gods. It shews us (John, i. 3. and Ephes.

iii. 9.) that God created all things by Jesus Christ;— it gives us the religious history of mankind in all ages ; —and points out the fate of mighty empires, such as Babylon, Greece, and Rome, so far as they were connected with that religious history : in short, it gives us the history of religion from the beginning of the world, when the first transgression took place, to the consummation of all things. Now consider what a vast space of time all this occupies ; and that six thousand years of it are already nearly elapsed : think also, what a vast number and variety of minor things are mentioned in the Scriptures as connected with the greater and more important ; so that if there was any possibility of confuting either the greater or the less there is full scope, from the length of time they occupy, and from their number and variety, to do it. But neither the greater nor the minor points of the Scripture prophetic history can be confuted, or shewn to have *nothing* in them, by any historical evidence whatever ; all the learning and improvements of this enquiring age cannot overturn either the Scripture facts or prophecies : and hence, though it should be admitted that the evidence for revelation is doubtful, yet this very doubtfulness implies a positive argument for its truth, or at least that there is *something* for its truth ; for if it could have been proved false, or to have *nothing* in it, this certainly would have been done long ago.

In addition to the religious history of the world, the Old Testament contains first a chronological account of things and a genealogy of persons, from the beginning of the world downwards for between two or three thousand years. It gives, secondly, an account of God's selecting a particular nation, the Jews, to be his people in a peculiar sense; and it informs us of the miracles which he wrought in their behalf, and of his threatenings to make them a reproach and a bye word among all nations, if they fell into general idolatry. It predicts, thirdly, that for the disobedience and idolatry of the Jews, God would scatter them among all nations; but that he would restore them again to their country. And, (Deut. xxviii. 64. and xxx. 2, 3. Is. xlv. 17. and lx. 21. Jer. xxx. 11. and xlvi. 28. and xxxi. 36, 37. Amos ix. 15.) in the fourth place, that though God would make a full end of all other nations, yet he would not make a full end of them. It also foretold, fifthly, that a great person, the Messiah, should come into the world, in whom eventually all God's promises would be finally fulfilled: and it is a certain fact, that in consequence of the predictions concerning this personage, a very general expectation of him prevailed in the world, at the time when Christ made his appearance. It also foretold, sixthly, that the Messiah would be rejected by the Jews; but that the Gentiles would believe on him. And, lastly,

the New Testament informs us, that at the very time, when men were expecting the Messiah, a person did rise up among the Jews, who claimed that title:—that he spent some time in working many and great miracles, and that he gave his immediate followers and disciples power to perform the same;—and that his disciples made numerous converts throughout the world, of the religious state of which the New Testament professes to give an account to its very end.

Now let us suppose a person totally ignorant of revelation to have all this told him. Or suppose you were to put the Scriptures into his hands, and he should ask if the whole was not a fiction; and that you, instead of telling him whether you thought it a fiction or not, should tell him the following certain facts.

Tell him, first, that the belief in one God, and that virtue is his law;—and the belief also that man will be hereafter punished or rewarded according to his works in this life, is chiefly owing to the Scriptures, yea even in those countries, such as the mahometan, which do not acknowledge their proper authority: tell him, further, that many nations do acknowledge their proper authority; and certainly he must think that the Scriptures are a most wonderful book, and deserving the most serious attention. Let him consider the importance of religion to mankind,

and how much their temporal advantage is connected with its observance; and surely he must think it a great proof in favour of the Scriptures, that they have so much promoted religion, by giving just ideas of God, and of a future state of rewards and punishments. Let him be told, secondly, of the known antiquity of the first parts of the Bible; and that its chronology, and account of the first peopling of the world, are confirmed by common history,—by the state of the earth,—and by the late invention of arts and sciences. Tell him, what is the fact, that as the whole Bible-history of common events is confirmed by the state of the world and by other writings; so the whole history *itself* contains nothing for any reasonable ground of suspicion either of its truth or accuracy: tell him, that it relates manners and events suitable to the times in which they are said to have existed; and that the Scriptures bear evident *internal* marks of truth and veracity. And certainly he would think all this very much in favour of the Scriptures; and still more so, when he was informed, that as the New Testament confirmed the Old; so the New Testament itself is confirmed to a very high degree by pagan authors. And hence he would think, that as the common Scripture history is rendered so credible by different means; so also is its miraculous history rendered credible by the

common, since the one implies and is connected with the other.

Let him be told, thirdly, what is an acknowledged fact, that there was a nation, the Jews, whose very being as a nation depended upon their belief and worship of one only God;—that as a nation they did worship him, while all other nations were sunk in idolatry;—and that, though they frequently fell into idol worship, yet still the belief and worship of one only God was revived and is preserved to this day among them. Fourthly, tell this man, supposed wholly ignorant of history, that a person claiming to be the Messiah sprung up among the Jews at the very time when from former prophecies they expected him;—that also according to prophecy, they rejected him and put him to death, but that soon afterwards, upon the evidence of miracles, he was believed on by numbers of Gentile nations. Tell him also, that Christ's religion, in a short time, spread itself over a great part of the world, and supported itself in spite of the greatest opposition and persecutions; but that the Jews, because they rejected the Messiah, were dispersed over the earth, as had been foretold long before. Tell him further, that though the Jews are dispersed over the whole world, yet they still remain a distinct people, according to predictions which were delivered some

thousands of years ago : and that their preservation, according to prophecy, looks forward to something yet to come, when they also will believe on that Messiah whom they once rejected.

Finally, let such a person, who does not know whether the Scriptures are a fiction or not, be told these positive facts ; and let him compare them with the Scripture prophecies. Let him know, that so far as the belief and worship of one God prevails in the world, it is either directly or indirectly by means of the Scriptures ;—that the Bible is a book of acknowledged antiquity, and that its common history and chronology are highly credible. Let him know, that the Jews were once the people of God in a peculiar sense ; and that they expected a Messiah, in consequence of predictions which had been for ages delivered to them ;—and that a person did arise among them, at the very time when they expected the Messiah, who laid claim to that distinction : tell him that the Jews rejected this person, but that the Gentiles, through the evidence of miracles, believed on him ; but that the Jews, as had been predicted, were dispersed through the world. Tell him also, that though the Jews are dispersed through the world, yet they still remain a distinct people ; and seem to be reserved for some great future event, when they will believe on Christ. Finally let him know, that the present state of the christian church,

and of several kingdoms, such as of Babylon, Greece, and Egypt, and of many other countries, exactly corresponds with what is predicted in the Scriptures respecting them: and surely in all this he would acknowledge that there is something more than human; and that at least there is an *evident probability* of foresight,—of something divine. He must see, that all these things, when put together, amount to a great mass of evidence, which nothing but the most culpable negligence or prejudice can overlook. He must acknowledge, that the evidence for the truth of the Scripture miracles, and the conformity of events with Scripture prophecies, amounts to *something*; to something upon which every prudent man should act, and upon which in the common affairs of life, he would be obliged to act.

It cannot be reasonably supposed, that the conformity of so many great and important events with prophecy could be by accident; and if not by accident, then is the proof for revelation decisive. So long as revelation cannot be proved absolutely false, we are under the most awful responsibility for our conduct and behaviour; indeed the very *possibility* of its truth, as I have often told you, imposes upon us the greatest attention to our principles, and to our lives and conversation.

Finally, as there is no presumption beforehand, nothing in the nature of the thing against a revela-

tion ; and as christianity, both in general and in its particulars, is conformable to the present course of nature, and as there is positive evidence for its truth ; it follows, that to reject or despise christianity, must be to act in opposition to every practical principle of common life.

I am, yours, very sincerely, -

J. W.

LETTER VIII.

*On Objections against arguing from the Analogy
of Nature in Defence of Religion.*

Cheam, October, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

IT is by no means unlikely but some thoughtful men, as well as those who can give their opinion of matters without considering them, and censure without knowing the real case, may object to our *manner* of answering objections against natural and revealed religion. They may say:—"it is a poor thing to endeavour to solve the difficulties of revelation, by telling us that there are the same difficulties in natural religion; when we want the difficulties of *both* removed. They may alledge, that it is a strange way of convincing men of their religious obligations, and of reconciling them to doubtful evidence in the matter of christianity; to tell them, that they are obliged to act upon doubtful evidence in their temporal conduct; and they may say, it is equally strange to vindicate the justice and goodness of God,

and the reasonableness of certain things in religion; by shewing that like objections lie against natural providence. They may also add, that at best the reasoning adopted in these letters must leave the mind in a state of great doubt; and that it is not likely men will forego their present pleasures from a regard to religion supported only by doubtful evidence."

Let us then attend to these objections, and perhaps something may be advanced which will tend to silence thoughtless reasoners and talkers; and to assist those who are really serious in matters of this nature. First, then, what do such objections not only imply, but directly require? They require that *all* difficulties should be removed on questions respecting the divine government. And surely this is wanting to know too much; for it is in fact wanting to know the divine nature, and the plan and manner of eternal Providence. But certainly no creature like man, a creature of such limited powers and faculties, can understand this; it is necessarily beyond his reach and comprehension, and therefore it must be absurd to desire it. To argue from what is known to what is disputed, is a fair and proper mode of reasoning; it is what we do constantly in the concerns of life: to argue, then, from natural to revealed religion, is perfectly just and proper; and to solve the difficulties of the latter by the former,

no more deserves the epithet *poor*, than the process of our reasoning in every case of common life. And indeed it must be admitted, that the epithet *poor* may be applied to almost the whole of our knowledge in our temporal capacity; for certainly it is a poor thing that the wisest physicians know so little of the nature and cure of diseases, which involve the life of man; and also a poor thing that the wisest philosopher is not able to answer questions which a child can propose: and yet poor as all this is, still you are well assured, that our knowledge both of natural philosophy and medicine is infinitely better than absolute ignorance. So also the knowledge, which we can and may obtain in matters of religion, is infinitely better than none at all. Observe, further, it is of great importance to shew, that the objections which are made against revealed are ultimately levelled against natural religion; in order that men may see to what their objections tend; and that while they pretend a regard to natural religion, they are really doing all they can to lessen its influence upon men's minds. If you do admit natural religion to be true, then must the objections made against revelation fall to the ground; for we have seen that the same objections may be made against what you allow, as against what you deny. In fact, the objections which are made against christianity, are of the same kind with those which may be made against

both natural religion, and the common course of natural providence : admit then that there is a righteous Governor of the world, and your objections against revelation are invalid ; and christianity may be vindicated from its conformity to the constitution and course of nature, as well as from its analogy to natural religion.

But, secondly, you must ever bear in mind that religion is a *practical* thing ; and tends, if you take its truth for granted, to promote not only your present but your future happiness. Now, convince a man, that attention to religion is as necessary to secure his future happiness, as prudence is to secure his temporal welfare, and he must certainly think it his duty to regard it ; for he knows that prudence is essentially necessary to his worldly prosperity and peace. Let us suppose, what indeed I take for granted, that a due regard to religion is as likely to secure a man's future happiness, as prudence is to obtain temporal success ; and it must follow, that if his future happiness be of more importance than his present, if eternal things be of more moment than temporal, he will see greater reason for securing the former than the latter. But still an objector will say, if religion were true, it would not be left upon doubtful evidence ; and since its evidence is doubtful, this is a presumption that it is not true. But what does the word doubtful here mean ? why,

that the evidence for religion is not intuitive or demonstrative. But, in our affairs in life, we are obliged to act upon doubtful evidence; God has so constituted the world, that in your present concerns of the greatest moment, you must act upon doubtful, very doubtful evidence: this objection, then, takes for granted, that God will not act as you see he does act; and is therefore altogether invalid. It must then be an argument in proof of religion, to find that we must act with regard to it as God has determined we shall act in our temporal capacity; and that religion requires of us to act in no other manner with respect to it, than our worldly affairs absolutely demand and make necessary with respect to them.

I wish you, thirdly, to recollect, that it is not so much the business of these Letters to vindicate the character and providence of God, though perfectly capable of vindication, as to point out your duty; for it behoves us much more to know the latter, than to trouble ourselves with objections about the former. Your duty is your great concern; the character and providence of the Deity much less so than many imagine. For, first, religion does not make it necessary to vindicate the character of God any further than to shew, that the things, which are objected against as being contrary to justice and goodness, may really be agreeable to and instances of them.

You cannot see the whole of things;—you see but a mere point in the plans of infinite Providence;—and are therefore incapable of judging of its ways. The very things, then, which are considered as being contrary to justice and goodness, may in their connection with the vast plans of divine Providence be instances of infinite justice and goodness; and this is all the vindication which it is necessary for religion to make of the divine character. Observe, secondly, we do not vindicate the justice and goodness of God in matters of religion, by admitting that objections *do really and in fact* lie against his justice and goodness in natural providence: but we suppose such objections to be made, and then shew that they are inconclusive. Hence then it follows, that the things, which are objected against in religion, are credible as matters of fact; since they correspond with the present course and order of nature. For instance, it is credible, as a fact, that God will hereafter punish the wicked; because it is a fact, that by the natural course of things he now in this life punishes them. Whatever objections then, thirdly, men may raise, either from *their* ideas of justice and goodness, or from the doctrine of necessity, against future punishment, still the thing is credible; because we see that God does now rule the world by rewards and punishments. Fourthly, the system of religion is reducible to facts; but the credibility of facts may be proved *independent* of their reasonable-

ness: hence then it follows, that we are bound to practise religion upon the credibility of its facts. He, who has due conceptions of the perfections of the Deity, will be perfectly satisfied of the reasonableness of his precepts, though he may not be able to perceive it in every instance; and hence he will yield a ready obedience to his authority. If you admit the perfections of God, you can have no doubt of the *reasonableness* of every thing He enjoins. Hence, lastly, though analogy is not a direct answer to objections against the *reasonableness* of certain things in religion, yet it is a direct answer to objections against their *credibility*: and as we poor limited creatures are very inadequate to judge of their reasonableness, we ought certainly to be influenced by their credibility; if that credibility can, as indeed it has been shewn.

But, fourthly, I do admit that the argument we have pursued in proof of religion does not amount to demonstration; but it does amount to such a very high degree of probability as to become fully practical. Nor should you be surprised that it does not amount to demonstration; since no system of common life and conduct can be proposed, which is capable of demonstrative evidence. If you put religion out of the question, many men will tell you that they doubt whether human life itself be worth enjoying; and that it is very doubtful whether our easures or our pains preponderate. There are ge-

neral rules for conducting life, and for preserving and recovering health; but these rules are not demonstrative; they are precarious and uncertain, and very far from being exact. But still the constitution of our nature absolutely determines us to preserve health and life, and to procure their enjoyments: and yet, though God has so formed us, still He has left us to act upon doubtful evidence with respect to the means by which we should preserve either life or health; we must gather our rules of life from experience, not from intuition or demonstration. In the most common as well as the most important affairs of life, probability is all that we have for our guide; and if we even could *ensure* success in our undertakings, yet we do not know that we shall be happy when we have obtained it; for the very things which we think would make us happy may be the occasion of misery and anxiety. Indeed it is almost impossible to describe the vast uncertainty of every thing in our temporal capacity; and yet we do not throw away life, and refuse to act at all, because we do not know demonstratively how we should act: surely, then, men are not at liberty to disregard religion, because its evidence is not demonstration.

Recollect also that religion takes for granted, that we have a certain degree of honesty and integrity; in the same manner as you take for granted, that a man can hear or understand your language when you

address him. Religion is then to exercise and improve our moral capacity; and though its evidence may not be able to satisfy *curiosity*, yet it is sufficient for the purposes of probation, and even more so than if it amounted to demonstration. In your temporal capacity you act not upon certain evidence, but upon that which on the whole appears the most satisfactory; you are not sure of success, but must pursue that conduct which appears the most prudent. You are every day obliged to act in your worldly concerns upon very low degrees of probability, and often even in opposition to probability; this is surely then a reason why you should act upon probable evidence in matters of religion.

But, fifthly, you may say, is it likely that man will be influenced by probable reasoning in matters of religion? To this I answer, *they ought*: what they will or will not do is their own concern. Ought a man to give himself up to total idleness, because he is not *sure*, as he really is not, of success in business? If men will not act till they have demonstrative evidence for their conduct, they must altogether cease to act; for that kind of evidence they never have in the general concerns of life. I point out what you should be, and how you should act; but if you act differently *you* are to blame. The very offer of religion to men puts them into a state of probation, however they may please to conduct

themselves; yea, the very supposition of its being doubtful imposes upon them a most serious regard to it. So long then as there is any likelihood that men can and will be influenced by probable reasoning, so long ought we to press it upon them. And it is likely that they will be influenced by reasoning of this kind in matters of religion; for they own its authority and sway, and incessantly act under its influence in all the various concerns and business of life. As, then, they act upon it in one case, it ought in reason to be expected that they will act upon it in the other.

There is one thing more to be observed, which is of great moment; and that is, that we have considered religion merely as a matter of fact. Throughout the whole discussion we have omitted two most important principles; viz. those of human liberty, and the eternal moral fitness and unfitness of actions prior to all will whatever: and not only have we omitted these two principles, but we have shewn that if even the doctrine of necessity be supposed to be true, yet still the obligations of religion will remain in full force. Christianity and natural religion are both reducible to questions of fact: for instance, in natural religion, the proposition, that there is a God, the righteous Governor of the world, is a question of fact; and yet this proposition may be fairly said to contain the whole system of natural

religion. As a fact, then, we have discussed it, and without reference to the eternal moral fitness and unfitness of actions. The doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments also becomes a question of fact: for as it is a matter of plain experience, that men are necessarily punished by natural providence for improper conduct, whatever difficulties speculative men may raise about it; so also the question,—Will God in a future life punish a certain kind of behaviour?—becomes merely a question of what will or will not be. Whatever difficulties speculative men may raise about either present or future rewards and punishments, it is a fact that in this life natural providence does punish bad actions as such, and reward good actions as such: it is then probable, as a fact, that the same thing will take place in futurity.

I grant, that the proof we have given of a future state of rewards and punishments, is not a demonstrative but a probable proof; and hence, like all probable proofs, may be objected to and cavilled at. But had I used the two principles of human liberty, and the moral fitness and unfitness of actions, the proof would have been much stronger. But still, without these two principles, we have made out a proof which neither can be answered nor evaded; and which is of the greatest importance, because it is wholly practical, and founded on constant matter of fact and experience. And hence the obligations

of religion have been proved independent of the principles of liberty and moral fitness; principles which have been perplexed, as every thing of that kind may, with difficulties and abstruse reasonings.

From the whole of this letter perhaps you have already gathered two observations; first, that the proof of religion from analogy, will be an additional proof to those, who believe in the principles of liberty and moral fitness;—and secondly, an original proof to those who do not believe in them. Believers will find christianity cleared of objections; and unbelievers will find all their attempts to prove christianity false, to be vain and really absurd. Religion is reducible to facts; as a matter of fact then we have discussed the subject, and compared the facts of religion with those which exist in nature: and since the latter are taken for granted to be according to the will of the Deity, it follows, that the former are most assuredly probable; and if probable, how ought we to live and conduct ourselves in all truth and piety.

I am yours,

J. W.

LETTER IX.

Recapitulation and Conclusion.

Cheam, October, 1809.

DEAR SIR,

WHEN one reflects upon the morality of christianity, it seems almost incredible that there should be any man, in countries where the Gospel is known, who can disregard or be indifferent to religion. The morality of the Gospel, when proposed to the mind, seems almost intuitively true ; whatever reasons, then, may be assigned, to account for some men's disregard of religion in ages and countries in which christianity was not known, it seems almost incredible, did we not see the contrary, that men should disregard religion where it is known. The proofs that there is a God, who made and governs the world, and will eventually judge it in righteousness, are level to the capacity of all men : for the innumerable instances of design in the works of creation, must prove a designer ; and it is intuitively certain, that

creatures ought to live in obedience to their Creator; and it is as certain, that his laws and conduct towards us are founded in justice and charity, since he has made us *necessarily* social beings and members of civil society, which cannot subsist without justice and charity. And since of necessity we must be punished in civil society for acts of wrong and injustice, and be rewarded by protection for propriety of conduct; it follows, that God has put us under a system of rewards and punishments, which we cannot avoid, and hence that we are accountable for our conduct.

But still it must be admitted, that the truth of *revealed* religion is not intuitive; it requires external proof before we can receive it: yet inattention to revealed implies a disregard of natural religion; for since both claim to be the voice of God, both therefore claim and demand our most serious attention and regard. To examine then the evidence for the truth of the Gospel, and to receive it if true, is properly and strictly moral; because a religion claiming to be revealed must of necessity impress men's minds with awe and reverence towards the Deity, and if true, must have considerable influence upon their manners and conduct. But some profess to reject both natural and revealed religion upon speculative principles: they deride the idea of God's moral government over the world; they renounce his protec-

tion, and defy his justice. Others pour the utmost contempt upon christianity, both as it respects its author, its whole scheme, and its different parts; and act viciously upon principle: while some, whose lives are not grossly immoral, oppose the Gospel, and represent it as groundless. Let it then be admitted, that such people act upon what they think principles of reason; yet it is impossible to imagine that they can think the evidence for the truth of the Gospel amounts to *nothing*, if they allow, which they must in all reason allow, that its system and circumstances are credible like other matters of science and history. The opposition, then, of such men to christianity, must arise either from objections which they think lie against all religion, and which objections we have answered; or from objections which they think lie peculiarly against the Gospel.

Hence we find, that they object to the very idea of a revelation;—they think certain things in christianity are unreasonable;—they suppose that, if a revelation were true, it would be universal;—and that its evidence would be perfectly satisfactory, i. e. demonstrative;—and they also imagine, that if a revelation were given by God to man, it would be given in a manner different from that in which the Gospel is given. Now all these objections against christianity do not prove that its evidence appears to them to be *nothing*; but they prove that they

fortify themselves against its evidence, whatever that evidence may be : and as for those who oppose christianity, and yet are in *doubt* of its truth, their conduct is to the highest degree unreasonable ; for they act as if they considered doubt and certainty to be the same thing ; than which nothing can be more absurd.

Now the manner in which we have treated the subject of both natural and revealed religion, is adapted to those who object to all religion ; and to those also who believe in natural religion, but either deny revelation, or are in doubts respecting it. For, first, we have answered the objections which are made against the *moral system of nature* ; and then we have shewn, that there is no peculiar presumption, beforehand, or from the nature of the thing, against *christianity* either as a matter of fact, of reason, or of miracle. We have seen, from the analogy of nature, that if God did give a revelation to man, it would contain many things which would appear liable to objection, though perfectly proper, just, and good, in themselves ; and that they would appear so to us, if we could but see the whole of their connections and relations. We have shewn also, from the general course of nature, that the christian scheme of redemption would be effected by a long series of events ; and not all at once, as some imagine : and that the appointment of a me-

diator between God and man, is perfectly analogous to the constitution and course of the world. We have shewn that neither reason nor experience can prove any thing against that vast and particular efficacy, which the scriptures attribute to the interposition of Christ: and, that as in nature God has afforded us the means of recovering from and avoiding evil; so also in christianity, he has provided us the means of recovering from that wretched state in which it supposes us to be, and in which experience proves we are. It has been proved further, that the want of universality in revelation is no objection against it; since both nations and individuals experience the greatest variety and difference in their natural advantages: nor is it any argument against the Gospel, that its evidence does not amount to demonstration; since we are necessarily obliged to act through life in our most important concerns upon doubtful, and sometimes not only upon very doubtful but almost improbable evidence. Further, we have shewn that there is a great mass of *positive* proof in favour of christianity; and that when all due deductions are made for objections against that proof, still there is a great quantity of *positive* evidence remaining: and hence, that all immorality and prophaneness is greatly aggravated in those to whom revelation is offered. Nay, still more, it has appeared, that the very doubting of the truth of christianity imposes upon men

nearly the same obligations seriously to regard it, and to observe its precepts, as if they firmly believed in it: in fine, that all prophaneness and blasphemy respecting christianity is absolutely without excuse; and that there is no reason to believe, that those men, who can be prophane, and can blaspheme the Gospel, would alter their conduct, though its evidence amounted to demonstration.

Before I close our correspondence, give me leave to add a few words more. You must have observed, that I have always spoken of religion as something more than a mere assent to its truth: true religion affects the temper and disposition, and regulates the conduct: while therefore you are studying the evidences of its truth, be careful to seek its spirit and influence, that your faith may be lively and operative. Christianity supposes that man is in a wretched, in a fallen state; and hence offers to him a Mediator and a Sanctifier: and I think it is of great importance to observe, that the wise, the learned, the pious Butler, through all his treatise, has no conception of any thing being christianity, which is not founded on the doctrines of a Mediator and Sanctifier. If you take away these two things, you reduce the Gospel to what is called natural religion; I say, to what is *called* natural religion; for in point of fact, there never was a time, since the creation of the world, when there was not a revelation. As

then a Mediator and a Sanctifier are two *essential* things in christianity, remember the duties which you *necessarily* owe to them, as well as to God the Father. You *necessarily* owe them worship, trust, love, and obedience; because of the real relations in which you stand unto them. As a wretched and fallen creature, you need a renewed nature and a right spirit; you need the mediation of the Son, and the influence of the Holy Spirit;—you need to be put into a capacity of being accepted by your Creator, and of being made happy in a future state. Let me then hope, that in all your studies you will have a chief regard to the *experience and practice* of true religion and virtue. Pursue your studies with all possible ardour, store your mind fully with a knowledge of natural and moral philosophy; but above all, seek the knowledge of God through his Son; seek that wisdom which is from above. You will find religion your best comfort in adversity, and adversity you will have in life; you will find it to be the only true regulator of your temper in prosperity, and prosperity perhaps you may acquire; and it will be your only sure support in the hour of death.

Religion will best fit you for every state in life;—it will make you bold in danger, and wise in council;—it will make you diligent in your profession, and faithful in the discharge of every duty. It will add a noble dignity to your attainments in sci-

ence ; and will enlarge and elevate your mind beyond the effect of any other cause : for to meditate upon the works of creation as the works of God,—upon the redemption of the world by the Son,—and upon the sanctification of our nature by the Holy Spirit,—will afford you the greatest source of the grandest and most sublime ideas ; and give the most enlarged scope for the exercise of your reasoning powers and devout affections.

Yours very sincerely,

J W.

PART I.

CONTENTS AND ANALYSIS.

LETTER I.

On probable and demonstrative Evidence.

1. **T**HERE is an essential difference between probable and demonstrative evidence: because demonstrative gives in all cases absolute certainty; probable produces various degrees of assent. But—

2. Probable evidence belongs to finite beings; and is to man the great and general rule of life: but to the Deity, all possible things are certain; to Him nothing can appear probable. And—

3. Men are so formed, that they must act according as the probability appears greater or less on any side of a question. Indeed—

4. Men constantly and of necessity use and act upon analogical reasoning; if, then, the system both of na-

tural and revealed religion can be shewn to be similar to the natural course of the world; then it is probable that they are both from God, if it be admitted, that there is a God, the natural and righteous Governor of the world. And

5. Hence the truth both of natural and revealed religion may be proved from the admission of there being a God, the natural and righteous Governor of the world.—

LETTER II.

On a future Life.

1. In this life men exist in very different states; as in the womb,—in infancy,—in manhood; therefore they may live in a different state after death. And as—

2. There is no *positive* reason, either from the reason of the thing or from analogy, to believe that death will annihilate us; hence it is probable that we shall survive death.

3. Nor does it follow that death will destroy the mind; though it should be supposed to be either discernible or indiscernible.

4. The body is an instrument to the mind; therefore the destruction of the body does not imply the destruction of the mind.

5. We can reason independent of the senses, i. e. of the body; therefore the destruction of the body does not imply even the *suspension* of our reasoning powers.

6. The body often dies when the mind seems in full vigour; therefore it is probable the mind survives the body. Indeed—

7. A future life is probable even upon the principles of atheism.

LETTER III.

On God's Government by Rewards and Punishments.

1. Mere existence in a future life, is a subject of no very great moment: the important point is, *how* shall we exist.

2. It is probable that we shall exist in a future state of rewards or punishment, according to our conduct in life, because—

3. All we enjoy, and a great part of what we suffer, is put in our own power: and hence—

4. Prudent conduct necessarily produces good, and imprudent conduct necessarily produces bad consequences: And hence—

5. It is a matter of fact, that we are under a system of rewards and punishments in this life: And hence—

6. It is probable that we shall exist in a state of rewards or punishment in a future life, according to our conduct in this. And—

7. That future punishment will be, what religion teaches us to expect, is probable from what happens in life: for often, in a man's natural capacity, one single act of impropriety intails upon him a life of

misery and ruin; and in his civil capacity, one crime is often the cause of his death.

LETTER IV.

On God's moral Government.

1. We feel pleasure and pain as the final causes of our actions: hence then we are under God's government in the same way as servants under a master, or subjects under a civil magistrate.

2. But this, at first sight, does not determine that God's government of the world is moral: But—

3. An attention to the analogy of nature will shew, that there is something truly moral in God's government of the world. For—

4. We have a moral nature; since men necessarily feel more satisfaction in virtue than in vice;—and virtue is necessarily more productive of human happiness than vice. And also—

5. In the natural course of things, good conduct is rewarded as such; and bad conduct punished as such: and this course of things appears just to our minds, and its appearing just to our minds, proves that we have a moral nature, and are under a moral government. Further—

6. Society must and does punish bad conduct as such: but society is natural; hence we are naturally under a moral government. Also—

7. Good men as such are trusted; bad men as such

distrusted: hence, then, there is a moral order of things necessarily established in the world; and hence it is probable, that it will continue after death, and be carried on to perfection. Further—

8. Our happiness and misery are placed much in each other's power: and hence virtue as such is encouraged, vice as such discouraged; and hence good men have hopes, not only for this life, but for the future; and bad men have fears. But—

9. Though the necessary tendency of virtue be to good, yet it must have scope and opportunity to produce its full effect: but in this life there is not scope for its full effect; hence it is probable it will have scope in futurity, and receive its reward. And as the necessary tendency of vice is to evil, so in futurity it will receive its full punishment.

LETTER V.

On our present Life being a State of Trial and Probation.

1. It is probable that our present life is a state of trial and danger in a religious sense: because—

2. It is a fact that men are in a state of trial and danger with respect to their temporal affairs. And because—

3. Their temporal success and welfare are in danger both from their *external* circumstances, and their *nature*;—from their passions and habits;—from the allurements and temptations which they have to resist;—

and from the example and influence of others, &c. &c.
Now—

4. All this is similar to what religion teaches us respecting our trial for a future life. And—

5. All this is equitable; because as with prudence men may enjoy tolerable quiet upon earth; so in religion, with due care, men may secure future happiness. And—

6. Hence, as our worldly happiness depends upon our own conduct, so it is probable that our future does also.

LETTER VI.

On a State of moral Discipline.

—That our present state is intended for a state of moral discipline, that we may be fitted for a future state, is probable—because—

1. The beginning of our present life is but an education for mature age. And—

2. Men are so constituted as to be capable of being made fit for things, for which they were once totally unfit. And—

3. All our improvement in our temporal capacity is progressive. And—

4. We need and are capable of moral improvement. And—

5. Hence, as each part of our present life is a necessary preparation for the next, and as we need and

are capable of moral improvement; so the whole of our present life may be a preparation for a future one.

LETTER VII.

On the Doctrine of Necessity, as influencing Practice.

—Admitting that the doctrine of necessity is reconcilable with the course of nature, yet this will not destroy man's accountableness, as a moral agent, for his actions: Because—

1. It is a matter of fact that we do exercise in our actions deliberation, choice, and preference. And we know by experience that—

2. Design in men's actions produces alterations in nature. And hence—

3. The doctrine of necessity as much requires a necessary agent, as the doctrine of liberty requires a free agent. And—

4. As it is a matter of fact that in this life men are and must be accountable for their conduct, it follows that they may be accountable in matters of religion in a future state. Also—

5. Our present happiness and misery are much the consequences of our behaviour: For—

6. God does govern the world by rewards and punishments according to the moral nature of our actions. And—

7. Hence, as we are accountable in this life for our conduct, whether the doctrine of necessity be true or

false, it follows that we may be accountable in a future life for our present behaviour.

LETTER VIII.

The moral Government of God is to us an incomprehensible Scheme.

1. Analogy, though it may prove a thing credible, yet it does not immediately prove it to be wise, just, or good. But—

2. Still, if it be admitted that there is a moral government over the world, then will analogy make it probable that this moral government is wise, just, and good. For—

3. The course of the natural world is a system far beyond our comprehension, and hence we cannot reasonably object to it: so also the moral system of the world may be a system far beyond our comprehension, and therefore we cannot reasonably object to it. And also—

4. In the natural world things that are good are often effected by unlikely means; so also may it be in the moral world. And—

5. The natural world is governed by general laws, which do not remedy particular irregularities by immediate interposition; so also may it be in the moral world. And—

6. We of ourselves do not know what is the manner,

in which it is best for the Deity to act in order to accomplish his purposes. Moreover—

7. If it be admitted that the proof of religion is doubtful ; still, on account of our present self-interest and the peace of society, we must be under moral obligations. And—

8. No argument can be drawn from our ignorance to invalidate the proof of religion. And also—

9. As analogy shews us positively, that we are incompetent judges in the things of nature ; so also must we be incompetent judges in the things of God's moral government, and therefore ought not to object against it.

LETTER IX.

Recapitulation.

1. Probability is the great and general rule for man's conduct in life.

2. It is probable we shall exist in a state of life and consciousness after death ; because we exist in this life in very different ways and manners : as in the womb—in infancy—in manhood—and are continually changing our bodies, and yet are still the same : and since in this life our powers of perception are often suspended, when they are not destroyed, and our powers of reflection are often exercised independent of the body ; it follows, that death may not destroy our powers of perception, nor even suspend our powers of reflection.

3. But it is probable that we shall live in a future life, in a state of rewards and punishments; because in this life we are in a state of rewards and punishments according to the moral nature of our actions.

4. That God's government of the world is moral is probable; because in this life virtue necessarily tends to good, and vice to evil; and virtue as such is rewarded and trusted, while vice as such is punished and distrusted.

5. That our present life may be a state of trial and danger in a religious sense, is likely; because it is so in a temporal sense.

6. That our present life is a state of moral discipline and preparation for a future life, is probable; because every stage of our present life is a preparation for the following one.

7. Nor will the doctrine of necessity, if even admitted to be true, destroy moral obligation or our accountability to God for our conduct; because we are and must be accountable and under moral obligation to society, and to each other as individuals, for our conduct.

8. Since the system of the natural world is a scheme quite beyond our comprehension; so also may be the scheme of God's moral government of the world: and hence we are incompetent to make objections against its wisdom, goodness, or justice.

9. If, then, religion may be true; we ought to practise it, as if it were proved by demonstration to us that it is true.

PART II.

LETTER I.

On the Importance of Christianity.

1. Christianity is of the greatest importance; because there is no sufficient reason for supposing, that any person could of himself have reasoned out even natural religion; and it is certain that the great bulk of mankind could not have done it. Because—

2. A standing admonition and institution were necessary to inculcate natural religion upon men: And—

3. Because many cases may occur, in which supernatural aid would be useful. And also, because—

4. Christianity is a republication of natural religion in its genuine simplicity. And not only so, but—

5. Christianity is an *authoritative* republication of natural religion. Further—

6. Christianity will assist a man, however favourably situated, upon the subject of natural religion. Also—

7. Christianity supports and maintains natural religion, by means of a visible church or society. Further—

8. The Gospel discovers to us the *necessary relations* in which we stand to the Son and Holy Ghost, as well

as to the Father Almighty: and hence the *necessary duties* of love, trust, reverence, worship, &c. which we owe to them. And hence—

9. Our neglect of the duties which we owe to the Son and Holy Ghost, may as naturally be attended and followed by evil consequences in a future life, as our neglect or violation of our duty to God or each other. From the whole, two things are to be observed—

10. First, positive precepts are those, whose reasons we do not see; moral precepts are those, whose reasons we do see: and hence, secondly, moral precepts should be observed before positive, when *both cannot be observed at the same time.*

LETTER II.

On the supposed Presumption against a Revelation considered as miraculous.

1. There is no presumption against christianity as miraculous, either on account of its not being discoverable by reason or experience; or on account of its not being like that course of nature which now is: if it even be admitted that it is unlike the present course of nature; which however is not admitted.

2. For it is no argument against any thing, that it is beyond the reach of our faculties. And—

3. This world is so small a point compared with the whole universe, that we cannot justly argue from what

takes place in it, against what may respect and affect the whole universe. And—

4. As there is no presumption against miracles being performed at the beginning of the world, because there was no known course of nature to which we can compare them: Hence—

5. If a revelation, which is a miracle, were made at the beginning of the world, it follows, that a revelation might be made in after times. And that a revelation was made at the beginning of the world is proved, because—

6. All history goes to shew that religion was first given to man by revelation. But—

7. Let it be supposed, that there is a presumption against miracles; yet this is only what there is against the most common fact or opinion, independent of proof. Moreover—

8. In the course of the world, 5 or 6000 years may have afforded fit and proper occasions for the interposition of miracles. And further—

9. The religious and moral state of man give positive reason for believing, that for his benefit miracles would be wrought. But—

10. Miracles ought to be compared, not with the ordinary, but with the extraordinary occurrences of nature: and as there would be great and strong objections in a person's mind against the extraordinary occurrences of nature, at the first hearing of them and independent of proof, whilst they were still perfectly credible and true; so also miracles may be perfectly

credible and true, though objections may be made against them.

LETTER III.

On the credibility that a Revelation would appear liable to Objection.

1. Objections against christianity itself are frivolous.
For—

2. Since we cannot trace all the causes and connections of any one single natural fact or event, much less of the whole scheme of nature; it follows, that we must be incompetent to judge of the whole scheme of revelation, i. e. of christianity. Moreover—

3. Experience teaches us, that the scheme of nature is different from what man might have expected, independent of experience; therefore the scheme of christianity may be so also, nay, will most probably be so.
And as—

4. We do not know beforehand, or independent of experience, how God would give us natural light and knowledge; therefore we cannot tell, independent of experience, how God would give us supernatural light and knowledge by a revelation. The question then is—

5. Do the scriptures or do they not contain a divine revelation; and what are the proofs that they do.
Farther—

6. We ought not to judge of a revelation by preconceived notions; for we find by experience, that if

we judge of the course of nature by preconceived notions, we fall into error and vain objections. And as—

7. God does not give natural gifts as we might expect beforehand; it follows, that he may not give miraculous or spiritual gifts, as we might beforehand expect.

8. Reason has a right to and must judge of the truth of a revelation; but when it has ascertained its truth, reason must then yield implicitly to revelation.

LETTER IV.

On Christianity being a Scheme which we cannot perfectly comprehend.

1. Christianity is a scheme which we cannot perfectly comprehend. Because—

2. It is a system including such a number of particulars, and is of such vast comprehension, as to reach from the beginning to beyond the end of time. And because—

3. As in nature means, and often the most unlikely means, accomplish the best purposes; so also is it in christianity. And because—

4. Christianity, like nature, may be carried on by general laws, the causes and reasons of which we cannot see. And further—

5. It is no objection against christianity that it has been carried on progressively; because all things in nature are carried on progressively.

LETTER V.

On the Appointment of a Mediator.

No part of christianity less liable to objection than the appointment of a mediator, since it corresponds so much with the whole analogy of nature. For—

1. God conducts the whole system of nature by the instrumentality and mediation of one thing to another, and of man to man. And since—

2. We do not know *all* the reasons why God has ordained future punishment; but do know that in the natural world he has appointed means for remedying the bad natural consequences of improper conduct: Hence—

3. It is probable, that he would appoint means for preventing future punishment, the consequence of sin. And—

4. As in our temporal capacity we find that in numberless cases mere sorrow or repentance for misconduct will not prevent nor remedy its bad consequences; so we cannot be sure that any thing, which we of ourselves could do, would prevent the future punishment of sin. And—

5. Hence, if God appointed a mediator, as the scriptures assure us he has, by whom we may be saved from our present wretched and sinful state, and by whom future punishment may be prevented, it follows, that

such an appointment is necessary and proper, though we cannot see all the reasons for it. Further—

6. Christ is our Mediator as a prophet to teach us—a King to rule over his people—and a Priest to atone for the sins of mankind. And—

7. To object against Christ's atonement, because we cannot see *how* it is efficacious to prevent future punishment and to procure for us the favour of God, is to the highest degree unreasonable; since in nature we cannot see *how* any one thing avails to produce another. And also as—

8. Vicarious punishment takes place in nature almost constantly; it follows, that vicarious punishment might be necessary in religion. And moreover—

9. It is no argument against God's appointments that we cannot see the reasons for them.

LETTER VI.

On Revelation not being universal, and its Proof being supposed to be defective.

It is no valid objection against christianity that it is not universal; or that its evidence is doubtful: Because—

1. God may give his favours as he thinks best; and not as we may imagine he should give them. And—

2. Since men enjoy different degrees of advantage in their temporal capacity; so also may it be in their religious. And as—

3. Men do and must act, in the affairs of common life, upon doubtful evidence; so also may they be obliged to act in matters of religion. Further—

4. The jewish and christian revelations have both appeared at different times with different degrees of evidence. And—

5. Since men will be judged according to the advantages they have had, and not according to what they have not had, they will, therefore, be treated justly. And also—

6. If christianity were universal, men's religious advantages would not be equal, because of their difference of temper, capacity, &c. &c. And as we are in a state of probation—

7. The exercise of our reason and understanding upon christianity and its evidence, may form a part of our probation. And as doubt and certainty are very different things; so—

8. Supposing the evidence for christianity to be doubtful to the highest supposeable degree, still we should be in a state of general probation. And—

9. The doubtfulness of the evidence for christianity may form the necessary trial of some men's character. But some men's doubts do not arise for want of evidence; for—

10. Numbers think very carelessly and lightly upon the subject, and hence arise their doubts. But still—

11. The proofs both of natural and revealed religion are level to the capacity of common men. And—

12. The very doubtfulness of the evidence serves to shew what is in man. And—

13. If we are in a state of religion, then our state of probation may, in a great measure, consist in being obliged to act upon doubtful evidence in matters of religion, as we are obliged to act upon doubtful evidence in matters of common life.

LETTER VII.

On the positive or particular Evidence for Christianity.

The positive or particular evidence for christianity consists principally of two things; viz. miracles and prophecies.

1. Now, for the miracles both in the Old and New Testament there is the *same historical proof*, as for the common events related in them: but the common events are acknowledged to be true; so then may the miracles. And—

2. St. Paul's epistles are in a particular manner a proof of miracles, and of the truth of christianity. Moreover—

3. Christianity claimed belief upon the ground of miracles, and obtained belief upon that very ground. But—

4. If it be said that men are credulous; to this it may be answered, that men are suspicious; and that when the Gospel was first published, all their habits,

manners, principles and prejudices, &c. &c. were in opposition to it. Also—

5. The apostles and first christians died in attesting to *facts*, of which they were competent judges; those facts, then, viz. the miracles of the New Testament, ought to be admitted as true upon every principle of common life. Besides—

6. The evidence of a number of intelligent and duly uninfluenced men for the truth of any event, is the highest evidence we can have of events; excepting that of our own senses: but this evidence, of a number of intelligent and duly uninfluenced men, we have for the christian miracles; and therefore we ought to believe in them. Moreover—

7. No one can, with any shadow of reason, object against christianity, that the apostles might be deceived; because there is no proof whatever that they were deceived. And—

8. That there have been pretended miracles, is no objection against the christian miracles; because the christian miracles cannot be proved false in the least degree. Further, as to prophecies—

1. The obscurities of some prophecies do not invalidate the proof of foresight in others that are plainly fulfilled. And—

2. Since in scripture a very long series of prophecies can be applied to a very long series of events, it follows, that these prophecies intended these events. And—

3. If it be admitted that the prophets did not know the meaning of their own prophecies, or that the prophecies might be applied to other events than those to which christians in general apply them; still even this will not invalidate the argument drawn from prophecy in support of christianity. Further, as to the *direct and circumstantial* evidence for christianity, it must—

1. Be united in one view, as well as considered separately. And also—

2. Revelation, or christianity, may be considered both in its facts and doctrines as wholly historical: and as its facts never have been proved false, this implies a strong positive argument, that they are true. And—

3. The Old and New Testament contain many prophecies all connected one with another, and which have been fulfilled in a proper sense. Now—

4. Let a person, wholly unacquainted with history, be informed of the scriptures facts, and of the prophecies, and of events which have fulfilled these prophecies, and he must own, that at least there is a proof of divine foresight, and of something more than human. Hence—

5. Men are bound, upon every principle of common life, to receive christianity and to act according to its precepts.

LETTER VIII.

On Objections against arguing from the Analogy of Nature in Defence of Religion.

1. To require all difficulties to be removed respecting the divine government, is requiring too much—it is requiring more than in fact we are capable of knowing. Nor do men seem aware that objections against revelation are ultimately levelled against natural religion: And—

2. If it be objected against christianity, that it cannot be from God, because it rests upon doubtful evidence: to this it is answered, that the objection is false; because, according to the course of nature, which is from God, we are obliged to act in common life constantly upon doubtful evidence. Moreover—

3. It is not so much the business of religion to vindicate the character of the Deity, though perfectly capable of vindication, as to shew us our duty. But—

4. Though the argument drawn from the analogy of nature in support of revelation be not demonstrative; yet it amounts to such a very high degree of probability, as to become perfectly practical. And—

5. If it be objected, that men are not likely to be influenced by doubtful evidence on the matter of religion: it is answered, that they *ought* to be influenced by that kind of evidence; and that it is likely they will, since they are influenced by it in their temporal affairs.

Lastly—

6. Religion is all along, in these Letters, treated as a matter of fact; and, as a matter of fact, shewn to be credible: hence, as a fact, we ought to be influenced by it.

LETTER IX.

Recapitulation and Conclusion.

1. The morality of the Gospel is almost intuitive; that any one, therefore, would neglect or despise christianity, seems almost incredible, did we not see it. And, as a fact—

2. It is plain, that by the very course of nature, we are in this life placed in a state of rewards and punishments; and therefore it is likely we shall be in a state of reward or punishment after death. And—

3. Though the evidence for revealed religion be not intuitive, yet, since revealed religion claims to be from God, to neglect it implies a neglect even of natural religion. And also—

4. The evidence for the Gospel cannot be shewn to amount to nothing. And—

5. Since doubt and certainty are very different things, the very doubting of the truth of the Gospel imposes on men a positive obligation to attend to it. Moreover—

6. If God did give a revelation to man, it is probable that it would *appear* liable to objection; though, in fact, not liable. And the analogy of nature shews—

7. That the redemption of the world would not be effected all at once, but by a long series of events. And also—

8. The appointment of a mediator corresponds with the known course of nature. And as—

9. Temporal advantages are not universal, so also it is no objection against christianity, that it is not universal. And since—

10. We are obliged in common life, according to God's appointment, constantly to act upon doubtful evidence; it is no objection to the Gospel, that its evidence is not demonstration. And in addition to all this—

11. There is a great mass of positive evidence for christianity. And hence—

12. Men are bound, upon every principle of common life and conduct, to receive the Gospel, and to act according to its injunctions. For—

13. True faith is not merely an assent to the truth of christianity; but incites us to love, to trust, to worship, and to obey the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in consequence of the positive and real relations in which they stand to us, and we to them.

FINIS.





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